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Dandy Jack;

OR,

The Outlaw of the Oregon Trail.

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AUTHOR OF "NICK O' THE NIGHT," "THE HIDDEN
LODGE," "NIGHTINGALE NAT," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE OUTWITTED GUIDE.

"Lost anything, stranger?"

The person thus abruptly addressed started from the stooping position at which he had been surprised and wheeled upon his questioner.

"Lost anythin'? I should reckon I had!" he ejaculated in a tone of mingled rage and disgust. "I've been an infernal fool, an' feel like whip-pin' Lige Butler all over. I'm mad—mad as a hull mad-house! at this partic'lar time the maddest man in Oregon. Say, whar do you hail from, an' hev ye see'd anythin' of a kivered wagon hitched to two hosses anywhar in yer travels? Ef ye hev, blurt it out, fur I've lost them partic'lar things—lost 'em last night by actin' the blarsted greenhorn—me, Lige Butler, whar has tramped this kentry fur nigh onto twenty years!"

He did not give his auditor a single moment in which to answer his question, but kept on at a break-jaw speed until he was obliged to pause to catch his breath.

"Hevn't seen a thing 'ceptin' a few Snakes these three days," answered the first speaker, who, from his perch on the back of a well-to-do horse, seemed to be studying the *personnel* of the uncouth individual who had twice alluded to himself as Lige Butler.

"Uncouth," I say, for that word in a nut-shell describes the gaunt specimen of humanity who, towering six feet above his moccasins of buffalo-hide, stood before the man on horseback. His face tanned by long exposure to wind and sun would not have been unhandsome if he had thrown the shaggy locks of dark hair that lay on his forehead back beneath the coon-skin cap he wore, and kept his beard in the neighborhood of a comb. His garments consisted of that half-civilized costume seen to-day along the numerous wagon-trails in the Far West, and his weapons, rifle, pistol and hunting-knife added to his brigandish appearance.

The man in the Mexican saddle was better clad, cleaner in appearance and passably good-looking. But he had evil eyes in his head which began to sparkle maliciously when he first set them upon the gaunt man bending over the trail. A *lazo* hung from the saddle-horn.

It was in the brief twilight of a summer day that the meeting just described took place. Not far to the south rolled the majestic Oregon, and it was in the midst of that well known wagon-trail so fatal to the early emigrants that Butler stood.

He had emphasized the truth when he said that he was "the maddest man in Oregon." Rage flashed from the depths of his deep-set eyes, and while he talked, he kept hammering the stock of his rifle with his great fist.

"I'll tell ye how it war, stranger," he said, coming up to the rider with one great stride. "An' when I git thro' jest git off an' kick me inter the river down thar. I left Council Bluffs

with twenty-three wagons in good trim, an' hyar I am with none. But I anticerpate, which isn't a fair shake when a fellar's tellin' a story. I felt jubious about the train all along, an' jest as I jedged, they got scared 'bout Injuns an' kept droppin' off. We hed sixteen wagons when we got to Laramy an' ten would't budge from thar. I cussed, stamped an' argued, but it was 'no go; an', b'ilin' over at the sneaks, but not half as mad as I am now, I led the rest on. At Fort Hall, up thar at Henry's Fork, they got what they call a panic, an', swamp me, stranger! if fourteen wagons warn't fur stoppin' thar, an' arter a rest, goin' back. Fourteen wagons outen sixteen! jest think of it. But the two had backbone; why the boy—I called 'im Dandy Jack, fur he war as pert a fellow as I ever guided—swore he'd go on to the coast ef he'd hev to hoof it alone."

"Thar's courage in little hearts," observed Long Lige's single auditor as the narrator paused to consult a plug of tobacco, evidently his last from the mournful manner in which he eyed it as he returned it to his capacious pocket.

"Courage? I should reckon there is!" he said. "Thet boy, Dandy Jack, isn't afeard ov all the red-skins on the plains. Wal, we kept on. Thar war eleven ov us now. I had promised the boy to take him through, an'—by hokey I'm goin' to do it yit! But we met with an accident. Up at the mouth ov Raft, one of the men took sick. It war a queer kind o' sickness; he got greenish spots all over him an' died. He war our best man. Then everybody began to git sick. It warn't in the climate, stranger, fur I've taken too many over the Oregon trail. I'm not goin' to express my opinion jest now; but,"—the fist came down hard upon the rifle-stock—"I've got one! Wal, everybody in the lead wagon died, 'ceptin' the gal, an' she didn't appear to ail at all. Curious wasn't it? That green-spotted disease, whatever it war—an' mind ye, I've got an opinion—took all but four: me, Dandy Jack, the gal, an' a man named Luke Whittles!"

The gaunt man's teeth grated harshly behind the last word.

"It war the dyinjest time I ever heerd on," he continued. "I buried the dead, put the gal in the only wagon left an' kept on. We got hyar last night; it war just getting dark like it be now. Now it isn't hard to take a train from hyar to the coast, ef the guide knows his business, an' I fancied thet I knowed mine. Yes, hyar's whar we squatted fur the



THE WAGON WAS THUNDERING TOWARD THE OREGON TRAIL.

night, feelin' bad about the dead, ov course, but expectin' no Injun raid. Dandy Jack was roastin' a slice of bufler-rump as I had larn't him on the route; when Luke Whittles came in an' said that thar was suspicious characters down at the river.

"Injuns?" sez I, reachin' fur the gun.
"Don't know, but it's suthin', that's sartin," he said, an' tellin' the two young 'uns to take care o' themselves fur a time, Luke an' me left camp.

"We got down to the place whar he said he had seed'd the suspicious characters; but thar warn't the sign o' man thar; I told him that his eyes hed fooled 'im, but he doubted it. Then it war, stranger, that I made a fool outen myself. He wanted me to wait at the place till he could scout down the river, an' bless me! ef I didn't wait! We war nigh a mile from camp an' thar I sot fur half an hour, but no Luke. Mad? I war the maddest man in Oregon, an' I'm that identical individual yit. All at once, quicker'n lightnin', I broke back to the wagon. It war gone, stranger; thar warn't a sign o' Dandy Jack, the gal, nor Luke Whittles. Why; the fire hed been put out—nuthin' left! It all popped into my head. The mean, pusillanimous skunk! to think that he come a game over Lige Butler what has tramped this trail ever since it's been one—that's what riles me! Don't I know *now* why we hev'n't seed'd an Injun since we left Fort Hall? They kept back jest to lull my suspicions, an' give *him* a chance. What hev I been doin' since daylight, stranger? Why walkin' up an' down hyar cussin' Lige Butler fur lettin' such a sneak scamp as Luke Whittles fool him! I'm mad yet; but I hev got down to business. The trail leads right toward the Snake country, an' if War-Bow an' Luke ain't hand in glove in this diabolical outrage, then I miss my guess. Mebbe as how that chap called Oregon Leon has got a finger in the pie. If he's fond o' gals it's more'n likely, fur she was uncommon pretty. I've never sot eyes on that rascal 'cep'tin' at a distance. He's about your size, stranger, I should judge."

"That is what others tell me," the man in the saddle said. "Like yourself, I have never met this bandit. But, what are you goin' to do? If Luke Whittles, as you call him, gets into the Snake country with his captives, the hunting of him will be uncommonly dangerous."

"Mebbe so, but whar he kin go, Lige Butler kin foller. I don't care if War-Bow, Oregon Leon an' Luke Whittles all three hed a hand in the diviltry, I'm goin' to foller an' git the wagon and its little ones back. I'm the maddest man in Oregon, an' worse than a nest of rattlesnakes when I'm riled. Don't forgit it, stranger!"

"But you will not attempt the rescue alone?" asked the man, affecting surprise.

"Thar's whar you miss it!" answered Long Lige, making a smile visible at the corner of his mouth. "The little one's got a big hold on my heart, an' they're goin' to hold on till I get 'em outen the diffikilty. Who are you, anyhow?"

The question so abruptly put startled the man in the saddle, and he saw the piercing eyes fixed upon him.

"My name is John Shotwell."

"Been long in these parts?"

"Off an' on for five years."

"Which way now?"

Long Lige had turned interrogator.

"I was on my way to the falls; but if I can be of any service to you—"

"Can't help me a particle!" interrupted Butler. "I'm goin' it alone. Ever go into the Snake kentry? Some white men carry a permit from War-Bow."

"Oh, I go anywhere in these parts," Shotwell answered with a smile.

"Then ye may hear ov Lige Butler, the maddest man in Oregon, in the Snake kentry. I'm goin' thar if the youngster's trail leads to it, an' I kinder think it does."

The face of the man in the saddle suddenly assumed a look of warning, and he solemnly pointed to the north-west.

"Yonder lies the country of the Snakes!" he said in low, measured words uttered to impress the man who was looking into his face. "It is a land of death. If Luke Whittles has taken the stolen property thither, an' I think he has, you might as well try to climb to the moon as to get it back. I don't say this to frighten you, Lige Butler; but to prolong your life."

"That's kind in yer," blurted the guide, not in the least moved by the warning. "But I'm goin' squar' inter that kentry which you call the land o' death."

"Then you'll never come out of it alive, for I'll be thar to see that you don't!" thundered the mounted man as he leaned suddenly toward

Long Lige, and sent the rifle flying from his hand by one sweep of his arm.

The next moment the horse sharply spoken to darted forward, while the guide, with a cry of astonishment, staggered back.

"Thunder and guns!" exclaimed the lank ranger, looking around for his rifle. "That's queer treatment from a stranger!"

His fingers closed eagerly around the rifle-barrel and he was rising with the recovered weapon when a voice came from the darkness rapidly settling over river and trail.

"Don't foller the wagon, fool!" said the voice. "You'll never see its white kiver, nor its load again, for I stand between you an' them; an' out hyar they call me Oregon Leon!"

Long Lige opened his eyes at mention of the bandit's name.

John Shotwell was Oregon Leon!

"I'm right glad I've met ye!" he shouted, in his rough voice. "I'll know ye next time, an' afore we part fur the last time, Oregon, ye'll find out that the maddest man in Oregon is worse than a handful of rattlers."

A scornful laugh came from the darkness, and Long Lige heard hoofs going down the hard trail.

CHAPTER II.

THE BOX OF DEATH.

We have spoken of the theft; now let us seek the thief.

At the time that witnessed the occurrence of the incidents first narrated, a large wagon, known in emigrant days, and at the present time also, for that matter, as a "Conestoga," was moving along the edge of a prairie in a northerly direction, gradually leaving old Fort Boisse to the left. The vehicle was drawn by four strong-limbed mules, one of which was ridden by the only man visible.

This individual would not have favorably impressed a physiognomist. He was a stout, dark-faced fellow, of at least six-and-thirty, slouchily attired, from the shapeless hat that sat on his head to the dusty leathern boots heavily spurred after the manner of a Mexican ranchero. His face was covered with a bristly beard of a fortnight's growth, and this, in its turn, was well filled with alkali dust. His eyes were small, deep-set, and far from having a kindly expression; in short, the man had the appearance of a villain.

He filled the Mexican saddle with the ease of an *arriero*, and every now and then sent the cutting lash of the heavy black whip over the ears of the foremost mules, which kept them on a trot.

The "Conestoga" lumbering on behind was untenanted so far as outward appearances went; but a precious burden was inclosed by its white canvas walls. Among the numerous packages of goods which are usually carried by those old-time wagons across the plains, lay a youth whose age could not have been past sixteen. His position proclaimed him a captive, for, indeed, his hands were cruelly bound upon his back. His head rested on a heap of blankets which had been arranged so as to form a pillow, doubtless by the fair girl who, seated near by, was looking through a loop-hole in the forward end of the canvas prison.

"Are we on the plains yet, Estil?" the boy asked, in a tone in which impatience was coupled to anxiety. "I know we've left the trail, for the wagon jolts but little now. Estil, did you hear me?"

"Yes, Jack," was the reply, and the face partially averted, was turned to the boy, revealing a rich and beautiful countenance. "You asked if we were on the plains. We are skirting a forest of strange-looking trees that lies to our right; but I can see no trail ahead. We left the old road some time back."

"The miserable scamp!" grated the boy raising his head so as to catch a glimpse of the slouched hat through the loop-hole. Then he grated his teeth and settled back upon the blanket again with a sigh.

Since the night before the Conestoga had been hurried with but two brief halts along the Oregon trail and across the alkali plains. The whip had never ceased to sound in the animals' ears, and the imprecations of that merciless driver kept the air well laden with profanity.

The girl, Estil, had not been bound by the graceless rogue. Her hands were free, but everything that had an edge had been removed from the wagon, and she was powerless to assist her companion. The knots of his bonds were Gordian ones; they could be cut, but not untied.

When asked for an explanation of his conduct in running off with the wagon and leaving Long

Lige the guide alone on the great trail, Luke Whittles had replied that it was none of the unfortunates' business. Once or twice he told them that he did not intend to stop until he got to the "jumpin' off place," and from the manner in which he kept the poor animals on the go, the captives were inclined to credit the assertion.

Dandy Jack, as Long Lige has already dubbed the boy, would have resisted Whittles' infamy if the rascal had given him the opportunity. But the youth had been surprised by Luke, who, having crept noiselessly up behind him like an assassin, threw his great weight upon him, crushing him to the earth, and making him a captive before he could speak. Then bound hand and foot, as he still remained, he was flung into the wagon, and the mules quickly harnessed to it again. The villain was forced to be expeditious, for if the old guide should come upon him before he had accomplished it there would be a new corpse on the trail.

Nothing seem to tire that traitor; the hot rays of the sun beating upon the canvas rendered the interior of the wagon almost suffocating; the mules were pushed forward under the keen lash of that terrible whip, and the man riding exposed to the furnace-like heat, seemed made of iron.

The day gradually faded and the twilight came on again. The air, changing with the change of light, became somewhat cooler; but the hoofs of the jaded teams still disturbed the alkali dust that lay at the roots of the thin grass, and the evening wind took it up in suffocating clouds, enough to blind man and beast.

"We must be going to that jumping-off place of which he has spoken," said Dandy Jack, giving the girl a faint smile as he spoke. "Doesn't he think that he has left old Lige far enough behind to give the mules a rest?"

Before the girl could reply, a loud "Whoa!" rung out upon the now pleasant air, and the vehicle came to a halt.

"Look out and see whafs' up, Estil," said the boy, and his companion went forward and put her face to the opening.

The wagon had halted in what appeared to be the middle of a vast plain. Not the sign of a road was visible. Luke Whittles was standing erect in the ponderous wooden stirrups and gazing intently forward. Estil looked in the direction thus indicated, but saw nothing.

"I can't be mistaken," she heard the traitor say. "They aren't bufler fur they hev'n't got the rollin' motion. I oughter be gittin' inter the kentry whar I should find—Injuns! by hokey!"

The multerer's exclamation which was unwelcome to the fair auditor, drove her from her place of observation.

"I heard him!" Dandy Jack said, before she could communicate her intelligence. "Indians! Estil, his discovery is not unwelcome to him for he would not have left the trail and come all the way into this country if he was afraid of the red-skins."

The boy captive was right. Luke Whittles was not disconcerted at the discovery.

"Hey! what ar' ye doin' in thar, my leetle ones?" his rough voice suddenly cried, and his repulsive face appeared at the opening. "I say, my leetle Dandy Jack, you war wishin' day before yesterday that you could see a lot of Injuns that don't loaf 'round the gov'ment forts. I've giv' you that chance, fur here comes a hull heap of that kind o' individual. They'll be here presently, so jest keep yer jacket on an' don't be oneasy. I fancy as how both of ye ar' goin' to git yer fill of the red devils afore ye git through with these parts."

Without another word the speaker turned away, and rising in the stirrups again, waved his hat above his head, executing at the same time a peculiar yell which Dandy Jack well knew was a signal call.

Luke Whittles remained in the stirrups until thirty or forty gayly-attired savages surrounded him, and broke forth in exclamations of delight.

"Listen, Estil!" said Dandy Jack. "They know the villain, and now I have no doubt they meet him here by agreement."

Estil, with her hand in that of Jack, and her face white but very lovely in its pallor, listened to the unintelligible conversation going on between Whittles and his dusky visitors.

"Yes, sir ee, I've got a precious load!" the pair heard Luke say at last, in English. "Thar be some goods in the wagon which ye kin make free with; but mind ye, the livin' freight ar' mine. Come, I'll show up."

So saying, the thief leaped from the saddle, and at a single jerk his hands widened the aperture at the rear end of the cover, and instantly

a score of painted faces looked down upon the captives.

Estil shrunk from the sight with a half-suppressed shriek, but the boy's eyes flashed fire at the Indians.

"White boy! white girl!" said one brave, in whose ears two great gold earrings were fastened. "Pretty squaw for Oregon Leon. Boy make good Snake."

Whittles gave the speaker an approving smile, but did not reply.

"Boy tied?" asked the Snake, glancing at the traitor.

"I should reckon he was," answered Luke. "Why, he's a very young wildcat. A precious time I'd hev hed gettin' here if I hedn't guv him the cords. Stan' aside if his hands git loose, my red covies!"

"Good Snake, sure!" replied the Indian, with much apparent satisfaction. "How boy like to be an Indian?"

"About as well as you'd like to see a company of United States soldiers at this minute," answered Dandy Jack, with spirit. "I tell you now that you'll never make an Indian out of me!"

The Indian and Whittles exchanged glances.

"White brother right," said the former, in his indifferent English. "Boy got much wildcat in him."

The hideous faces were now withdrawn, and Luke began to search among the goods for some particular article. He climbed into the wagon and continued the hunt, but at last began to exhibit signs of chagrin and disappointment.

"It war hyar when we started," he muttered to himself, and then with the fire of rage in his eyes he turned upon the young couple who had been regarding him with interest.

"Whar's the cask o' brandy?" he thundered, looking at Estil. "No lyin', girl! It war hyar when we started from the Oregon. What hev ye done with it? Speak! you little minx!"

The captives saw the man's hand tighten threateningly on the heavy whip. But Estil did not quail.

"I threw it out long ago!" she said. "It is away back on the trail."

"You did?" roared Whittles, becoming purple with anger. "You did?" and he drew the heavy whip back. "Fur jist one cent I'd make a mark on yer purty face that'd last yer life out. I war countin' on that cask to conciliate them chaps out thar, an' hyar you hed to pitch it out. Confound yer! ef it warn't fur my bargain I'd open yer cheek."

With a look that would have been creditable to an arch fiend, Luke Whittles turned abruptly away and addressed the savages in the Indian tongue.

His words made them yell like demons, and a rush was made for the wagon. Their hands quickly stripped the cover off, and they swarmed over the sides like pirates attacking a ship.

Whittles, with shouts and wild gesticulations, tried to keep them back. The villain's face was blanched to a deathly pallor. He raised the whip menacingly several times but did not strike. His story of the loss of the cask had not been credited.

"Don't tech the young 'uns an' I'll let ye look at everything I've got!" he cried. "Hyar's a box mighty heavy, brought cl'ar through from the Bluffs. From the way Long Lige guarded it I should say it war filled with gold. That's right, War-Bow; keep 'em back an' I'll hand the things out."

While Luke addressed the infuriated Snakes his hand rested on a large tin-box brass-bound at the corners. It bore no inscription save the words: "Precious! Keep dry," painted on one side.

He was in the act of lifting the mysterious packet from the vehicle when Dandy Jack's voice was heard. Its tones were startling.

"There's death in that box, Luke Whittles!" the boy cried. "It's full of nitro-glycerine; enough to blow us all up!"

"Niter glissereen!" gasped Whittles, starting back, and the next instant he leaped wildly from the wagon.

The terror depicted on his pallid face is simply indescribable. His mass of shaggy hair seemed to have risen on end; his eyes almost started from their sockets.

In a voice of frenzy he shouted something in the Snake dialect to the Indians swarming about the wagon, and they fled in every direction with ejaculations of mortal terror.

"I thought Lige watched that box kind o' keerful like!" Whittles cried gaspingly. "Niter glissereen! An' to think that I hev lugged that boxed up death behind me fur twenty-four hours an' never knowed it!"

Cold sweat stood on his brow, and he felt his blood congealing in his veins.

CHAPTER III.

AN EXCITING RACE FOR LIFE.

A KNIFE, Jack! a knife!

This cry suddenly welled from Estil's throat, and with exultant mien she held before the boy's eyes a buck-horn handle hunting-knife which she had discovered in the bottom of the wagon.

The weapon had probably fallen from the girdle of one of the savages.

Dandy Jack's eyes glistened. "Cut me loose, Estil!" he cried, "and we'll show these frightened fiends a trick."

Estil severed the cords which for four-and-twenty hours had held the youth in thrall, and he sprang up with a cry of joy.

"Lift the box upon the rim of the end-gate and hold it there! It is not heavy!" he shouted to the girl in tones easily heard by Luke Whittles and his companions, who had withdrawn to what they considered a safe distance. "If they approach near enough, throw it out and blow the whole of us to atoms."

Estil sprang to the box, whose weight did not exceed twelve pounds, and easily lifted it to the position indicated.

"Now, hold on!" Jack cried, glancing over his shoulder at the daring girl. "Please Heaven, we'll go back to Lige now, without accident."

Quitting the Conestoga, Dandy Jack threw himself into the saddle lately occupied by Luke Whittles, and seized the leathern lines secured by a half-hitch to the horn of the saddle.

He had no whip, for the one which had done service from Council Bluffs was in the hands of the treacherous teamster; but he soon learned that none was needed. At the sound of his loud halloo, the mules lifted their heads from the poor grass, among which they were trying to find some nourishment, and showed a willingness to go on again.

"We'll try the back track!" murmured Jack, as he whirled the team about, and the next moment the wagon was thundering toward the Oregon trail again.

A chorus of savage yells greeted Dandy Jack's act of daring, and before Luke Whittles could interpose a hand, a shower of arrows fell around the team.

"You'd better not follow!" shouted the boy, who, standing erect in the stirrups, was urging the animals to their topmost speed. "If you come near, Estil will fling the death-box out and there'll be a terrible explosion. Keep off! keep off! There's two revolvers on this saddle, thanks to Luke Whittles."

It is doubtful if any of the boy's words reached the ears for which they were intended. The rumble of the wagon was nearly deafening, and the almost human cries of the mules, tortured by the alkali dust, were pitiful in the extreme.

Dandy Jack had one hope, and that was that the fear inspired by the mysterious box would keep the pursuers aloof until he was able to rejoin Long Lige, whom he believed to be following the trail as rapidly as possible. Estil held the box firmly on the top of the end-gate of the vehicle. She looked like a veritable wild daughter of the plains, her wide blue sleeves waving back over her fair arms, and her hair streaming behind her like golden pennons. Her eyes were full of fire, her face flushed with excitement, and determined in aspect.

The unwearied animals seemed to comprehend the thrilling situation. At least the voice of Dandy Jack was not unfamiliar to them, for upon many occasions during the march of the caravan westward he had occupied the saddle, much to their apparent joy. For when he had charge of them the heavy lash did not cut their ears, and they heard good-natured words of command, instead of curses. And now it seemed that the mules wanted to repay their young master. They did not exhibit one sign of lagging, but kept on at a gait that was gratifying to the youth.

Darkness had fairly settled over the, to the fugitives, totally unknown country. But it did not deter them in the least. They knew that their enemies were following, for dark shadows that flitted behind, as yet at a respectful distance, and the whiz of an occasional arrow told them as much.

That box so firmly held by Estil on the rim of the end-gate still inspired the terror attached to the most dangerous explosive in the world, and which the Indians knew as *new thunder*.

The saddle filled by the boy was provided with a brace of holsters, each one of which was filled

with a Colt revolver of the "navy" pattern. These weapons Whittles had left in their places when he leaped among the Snake fiends, nor did he again think of them until he saw Dandy Jack gathering up the lines.

"The moon! by Jove, that's good!" the youth suddenly exclaimed, as a light in the far east told him that the full-orbed queen of the skies would soon sail above the horizon, and flood the scene with her silvery light.

This was to his advantage for it would enable him to watch the movements of the foe, who, in the dark, might perpetrate some devilry that would put an end to the flight.

Early in the chase Jack had thrown the flaps of the holsters back, and the butts of the grim pistols were exposed to view, and ready for instant use. He felt—a something that he could not define told him—that he would be compelled to use them before day.

The vast expanse over which the wagon flew was unbroken. The timber which Luke Whittles had skirted while directing his course toward the Snake country was left to the left, and Dandy Jack seemed to be guiding the team across the surface of a boundless waste. He did not know to any degree of certainty in which direction he was going; but he did know that he was pursuing a course exactly opposite the one taken by Whittles during his triumph, and this to Dandy Jack seemed the only road to safety.

If he hailed the appearance of the moon with delight, the sight of her was none the less welcome to the Indians. The bright light which swept over the barren like a flood, enabled them to see the team and note its course hitherto traced by its ceaseless rumbling.

With the appearance of the light the red demons of the plains began to describe great circles about the team. Their fleet ponies bore them ahead of the jaded mules, and their wild cries told Dandy Jack and his fearless companion that they were anticipating a speedy triumph.

"No stopping while the team can go!" cried the boy. "Every minute brings us nearer Lige, and he's worth a tribe of these red fiends."

He shouted at the mules, but shouts were not needed to urge the faithful animals on. They were doing all that bottom could do, straining every nerve to take the young fugitives back to the Oregon trail.

But that circle of living flesh gradually contracted. The Indians, seeming to believe that the explosion of the box would not spread death before the team, were concentrating there, and Dandy Jack saw the barbed arrow fitted to the string. They were going to rely on their stone-tipped shafts as the repeating rifles, purchased at the nearest Indian agency, were not taken from their backs.

Whiz! came arrow after arrow through the moonlight, falling at first harmlessly around the team or piercing the bed of the Conestoga. But their aim would soon become fatal, for every discharge of the shafts lessened the distance between pursuers and pursued. The boy not near enough to let fly his revolvers with effect, dropped 'tween the saddle mule and its mate, holding to the lines and thus shielding his body. But he had not resorted to this strange but effectual breastwork before calling to Estil to lie down in the wagon, which command was obeyed.

Like lightning on the edge of the storm-cloud the red men of the plains hung about the doomed team and its occupants. Luke Whittles was not to be seen. It will be recollected that the traitor, having been abandoned by the team, was left without a horse, and there was not an extra animal in the Snake band. Had the Indians deserted their white ally? Even so it seemed.

Fast and furious rained the arrows now; the animals, struck but not badly wounded by the darts, increased their speed under the pains thus occasioned, but the increase could not last.

All at once the foremost mules shied at a dark object lying in the moonlight, and among the short grass, and before Dandy Jack could right them the wheel struck the ill-omened thing, and the wagon, lifted from the ground for a moment, fell heavily on its side!

A fiendish yell from the throats of the Indians greeted this accident, and at that moment they let fly a volley of arrows, which, falling among the animals plunging about in wild disorder caused them in their frenzy to break from all control, leaving the Conestoga a wreck on the plains.

All now seemed over for the unfortunate pair!

The race for life maintained so gallantly for three hours had come to an end, and the vul-

tures of the barren were swooping down upon their victims.

The wagon thrown topsy-turvy, presented the pitiable spectacle of a wreck; its contents lay in disorder on the grass, but Estil its beautiful occupant was not to be seen.

Fate had brought the fugitives to almost retributive disaster, for it was the identical cask of brandy which Estil had thrown out during their captivity under Luke Whittles which had caused the present accident.

Where was Dandy Jack?

He was occupying a half upright position in the saddle when the cask sent the wagon on its side, and he disappeared among the plunging beasts. But when they finally broke away, carrying saddle and lines in their mad course over the plains, he sprang to his feet at the head of the wagon with the heavy pistols in his hands.

"Stand off!" he shouted to the yelling demons rushing forward to the spoil now within their grasp. "A fellow may as well die here as elsewhere. I'm going to defend Estil, and our property to the last!"

The reply was a shower of arrows which did not inflict any injury, although they fell all around Dandy Jack, and a number of lassoes which hung from the saddle-bows of the ponies were quickly uncoiled.

But at that moment the boy sprang over the broken tongue of the Conestoga, and with the precision and deliberateness of a regular opened on the red-skins with the revolvers.

More than one of those rapid shots told. The Snakes bewildered for a moment threw themselves behind the necks of their steeds, and with wild exclamations which Dandy Jack could not understand, forced them back.

"Four!" ejaculated the boy seeing that number of dark objects lying on the ground, a few yards ahead. "Four dead Indians and twenty live ones left. I'm almost out of ammunition. Each of those Indians carried a repeating rifle on his back. I must have them; they may save us yet."

A bound brought the boy to the dead, but to his inexpressible dismay he found that the living, probably anticipating his action, had carried the coveted weapons away.

The yells of derision which greeted the unwelcome discovery was followed by a loud voice.

"White boy brave; but if he no gives in he must die."

Dandy Jack looked at his foes. The moonlight fell directly upon them, and he saw them unslinging the deadly repeaters that hung on their backs.

"Twenty to one; but I've got three loads left I'll go back and stand by Estil to the last!" muttered Jack.

CHAPTER IV.

SUN-DANCE, THE TLAMATH.

THE "Conestoga," overturned by the whisky cask, had completely buried Estil, the girl, from Dandy Jack's sight. He was fearful as he sprang back, determined to defend her to the last, that she had been stunned, if not actually killed, by the fall of the heavy vehicle, and once on the spot, he called her name twice, but without receiving any reply.

Meanwhile the Snakes were unslinging their repeating rifles and slowly advancing. They were determined to force a surrender, or to rid the heroic boy where he stood.

"They'd lift my scalp if I gave up!" Jack said, to himself, "so, what's the use in giving in while I've got a ball left in the pistols? What! surrender to a lot of red-skinned greasers? I didn't cut loose from everything in the States and come away out here to do that. Now, come on!" he cried to the red-skins. "We'll try the virtue of powder and lead. No surrender! that's the motto of Dandy Jack!"

His defiance was received with yells by the savages, and before a rifle could be brought to the shoulder the boy had dropped behind the wagon with the intention of making it serve the purpose of a breastwork.

"This isn't going to the coast, by a long shot!" Jack said, a grim twinkle of humor in his eyes. "It's my first, and I suspect my last fight with the Indians, and it'll never get into the papers—they'll never know at old Willow Creek how Dandy Jack died."

The young hero, as he spoke, saw the savages execute a sudden halt just beyond range of the heavy revolvers which he gripped in his hands. But he finished his observation before he ventured to inquire into the cause of that halt.

Without a single exception, the Indians were looking toward the east, and at the same time

their hands held behind their ears told that they were listening intently.

"What's up?" ejaculated the boy, rising with mingled curiosity and hope, for from that direction he expected Long Lige, if that worthy came at all.

As he turned his face toward the east, he heard the rapid beating of hoofs. Some person was coming at a break-neck gallop, and he was astonishing the Indians.

"He's got betwixt me and the moon!" suddenly cried the boy as a dark object appeared on the disk of the full, round planet, as it were, and its singular motion, rising and falling, assured Jack that it was approaching.

At length the specter, for into such a shape the grotesque object grew as it came on, hid the moon from the boy's sight, and the thunder of hoofs was now thrillingly distinct.

But as yet Jack could not distinguish the form bearing down upon him; he could not see that the person who rode the horse was an Indian!

But such, indeed, was the fact.

The red man was seated on a worn-out government saddle, which was strapped to his steed by means of a cavalry girth. The animal was not large, but lithe of limb and capable of great endurance; it bore its rider with ease, and came forward with its head erect and eyes full of fire.

The Indian was a young buck, naked to the waist, about which his leggings were secured by an army belt faced with the traditional brass-faced plate, bearing the legend, "U. S." His face, for one of his tribe, was not unkindly cut, and devoid of paint. There were brass rings in his ears, and three feathers, two of which were either bent or broken, in his long, black hair—the only ornaments visible about his person if we except the breast-plate just mentioned. He was strong-limbed and muscular; that he was "hard to kill," the great scars on his breast proudly proclaimed—telling, as they did, the barbarous story of the sun-dance. The only weapon visible about the Indian was a rifle which his left hand held before him; his right was free but not to guide the horse; he performed that service with his feet.

On, on came the night rider, riding out of the moon as it were straight down upon Dandy Jack. He did not seem to notice the twenty Snakes who were watching his movements with flashing eyes; but he certainly heard their yells as they appeared to discover in him a foe. All at once the rifles of the hostiles belched out their leaden contents, but the strange Indian threw his body upon the neck of his careering steed and the bullets whistled harmlessly over him.

"That's curious!" muttered Dandy Jack, seeing this strange move. "Indian pitted against Indian! I don't understand it."

Ah! he was to know what it meant when in after days he knew more of Sun-Dance, the Tlamath.

"If they are enemies all cannot but be mine!" continued the boy, dropping beside the wagon, his eyes no longer on the Snakes but upon the new-comer on the field.

He held his pistols ready, each cocked in his hand.

He felt confident that the single savage had not yet noticed him, and when that worthy suddenly stopped his steed and rose abruptly from behind his breast-work of flesh, he saw the Snakes shrink instinctively back. Then a jet of flame escaped over the horse's head followed by another and another in such rapid succession, as to completely bewilder the boy.

The strange Indian had opened upon the Snakes, and his rapid firing was emptying saddles with terrible precision and fatality. The Snakes were thrown into the greatest confusion, and the few shots that replied to the Tlamath did no execution. He suddenly ceased firing, probably because he had exhausted his chambers, and before the sound of the last report had died away, he came down upon the wagon again.

Jack was released from his bewilderment in an instant.

"He thinks to finish me now!" he grated, bracing himself, and the next moment bang! went his revolvers full into the face of the solitary red-man.

The smoke for a moment shut out objects before the boy, but the thunder of hoofs still smote his ears, and he involuntarily shrunk nearer the wagon's bed to keep from being unceremoniously ridden down. But it was in vain that Dandy Jack tried to escape from the thunderbolt.

The horse was soon upon him, and before he could collect his scattered thoughts, he was jerked violently from the ground and borne away!

One of the revolvers fell from his hand as this

took place; but he managed to retain his hold on the other. The one held was the empty one as the youth soon discovered, for finding the muzzle pressed against his captor's naked breast, he attempted to discharge it, but there was no report.

The quick ruthless jerk that followed the click of the hammer upon the empty cartridge landed the boy directly before the Indian, and for the first time he obtained a view of that face from which only death was to separate him!

The gait of the steed, despite his additional burden, did not abate in the least. The Indian held Dandy Jack firmly before him, and replied to his amazed look with eyes full of triumph and revenge.

On, on went the Tlamath, and the journey seemed to grow endless to the little captive. He thought of the girl left behind to the mercy of the barbarous Snakes, and every hoof-beat was taking him further from her, further, too, from Long Lige.

Was that horse capable of galloping forever? His head was still erect, though he carried no bit between his teeth, and showed no signs of fatigue.

It was when Jack shut his eyes to keep out his painful thoughts, and to shut off the sight of that implacable red face above him, that the horse at last came to a stand.

The boy opened his eyes and raised his head. The moon was now high in the heavens, and her soft light fell upon the vast plain whose dreariness was unrelieved in a single instance. No timber; no water to glisten in the moonlight, nothing to tell Jack that his long journey with the unknown Indian had brought him nearer safety.

"Long ride!" said the Tlamath, in good English, as he met Jack's ill-natured look with the faintest of smiles. "White boy hold onto pistol all the time. He tried to shoot Sun-Dance; but it no go off."

As the Indian spoke, his gripe on the boy's arm relaxed, and Jack was seated before him.

"Sun-Dance?" the boy said, struck by the name. "Is that what I am to call you?"

"Sun-Dance is a Tlamath. Where white boy from?"

"If I told you, you wouldn't know," Jack said.

"Mebbe not, but Sun-Dance been to see the great father at Washington."

"Well, I came from the East, came out here with Long Lige! Ever hear of him in your travels?"

Sun-Dance started at the mention of the guide's name.

"Know him? yes!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Where him now?"

"That's just what I want to know," was the rejoinder. "Look here, Sun-Dance, I begin to see that we needn't be enemies; but it isn't that that troubles me now. You left a young girl back there with the wagon. I was going to stand by her till the last; but you came along and carried me off."

The Indian looked astonished.

"White girl?"

"Certainly! The Snakes have found her ere this."

"Mebbe not!" Sun-Dance said, taking courage, and his horse not spoken to but touched by his foot wheeled suddenly.

"We go back and see!"

Dandy Jack took hope. After all he might find a friend in Sun-Dance, and Estil need not perish.

Back dashed the Tlamath, but not in that breakneck speed just finished.

On, on they went and the moon was in the zenith when the tireless steed stopped beside the wagon.

Jack, unhindered by the Indian, leaped to the ground with an expectant cry.

"Snakes been here!" Sun-Dance said, before the boy could touch the overturned vehicle. "No use to look for white girl!"

Dandy Jack recoiled from the search which he was about to begin, and looked at the young brave.

"If white boy don't believe let him look!"

"Look I will!" muttered Jack, under his breath, and he fell to work, quietly watched by the savage.

At last he gave up in despair, and turned upon Sun-Dance a face which confirmed his observation.

Estil was gone!

CHAPTER V.

HUNTING FOR THE TRAIL.

"FOUND it at last! This is what a fellar gits fur keepin' on an' never givin' up. Bless me ef

the red-skins hevn't been hyar, fur they've left their marks on the wheels, and suthin's tore the kiver off. But how did the vehicle git inter this persition? Tongue p'inted straight to'ards the old Oregon trail! If thet skunk Luke Whittles had charge ov it when it upost, why war he comin' in that d'rection? That's somewhat of a puzzle, an' as I never war good at guessin' I give it up. Nothin' left hyar, I suspect, to throw any light on the subject."

The speaker, Long Lige, had leaped from the back of a mule and alighted alongside of the Conestoga lying a wreck upon the spot of its overturning. It was the evening of the fifth day after the several occurrences narrated in the foregoing chapters.

Long Lige looked somewhat travel-worn, but there was the flash of anger in his eyes which still said that he remained "the maddest man in Oregon." The animal which he had ridden to the unlucky spot bore certain well-known harness marks, and was in truth one of the animals lately harnessed to the wagon found at last by the persevering guide.

The mule seemed to recognize this unfortunate wagon; the head was rubbed against its sides affectionately, and other demonstrations of unmistakable delight were exhibited.

"Know the old wagon, eh?" said Lige, noticing the animal's actions. "Well, I should say ye oughter, havin' help pull it from the States, whar, p'raps, fur the sakes ov the leetle ones, we'd better stayed. But the milk is spilt an' we're not goin' to crook a lip are we, old chappy? I war lucky to catch you down on the Puny fork, creased you an' left a scar by which you'll remember Lige Butler furever, fur mules never die."

Butler patted the brute's neck as he spoke, and then turned his attention to the wagon.

He saw everywhere the marks of Indian tomahawks; the bows had been split into strips, the spokes cut in twain, and great gaps made in the sides. Not far away lay the cask which had caused the *contretemps*; but it was empty, though through the bung escaped the strong odor of western whisky.

Nothing remained undisturbed except a tin-box whose corners were bound in brass. This was the object which had struck terror to the hearts of Luke Whittles and the Indians—the can of "nitro-glycerine."

"Kind o' queer thet they spared this," the guide muttered, picking the can up in a manner which told that he was not afraid of its explosive qualities. "Some people hevn't got stomachs fur delicacies; this proves it. But—by my stars! thar's some scriblin' on the tin; some person hes written on it with the p'int of a knife!"

With eyes full of curiosity and wonder the old guide turned the box into the strong western light, and held it near his face. Looking straight at the broad side thus presented to his vision, he with some difficulty made out the following:

"This is nitro-glycerine to Luke Whittles and the Indians! I'm with—"

The knife-writing ending thus abruptly caused Lige to look up surprised. Then, before he spoke he shifted the box from side to side as if the light becoming uncertain now had interfered with his reading.

"Queer!" he ejaculated. "I'd almost call it a phenomener. Now, whoever writ that, an it looks like some o' the boy's work, hed to quit before he got done. He war goin' to tell me who he war with; but I'm left in 'Gypt'n gloom consarnin' that matter. Niter glisserene, eh? Niter glisserene in this can? That's queer! wonder how the bu'stin' stuff got in thar? Nobody's been tinkerin' with the box since we left the Bluffs, an' the bands are still sound. Look out, Luke Whittles an' Oregon Leon; I'll prove worse than niter glisserene afore I'm through with you!"

Long Lige put the mysterious box down and renewed his search but was unrewarded, save by a pair of capacious saddle-bags which had been rifled of their contents, and divided with the knife.

Muttering to himself that they might "come handy," he proceeded to sew them together by means of some leathern strips which he cut from the edges and soon finished his work.

Into one of the pockets he then thrust the tin canister, and threw the saddle-bags across the back of the animal which he had ridden to the spot.

"I'm a victim of sarcumstances!" Lige muttered, dolefully, as he prepared to mount. "Fooled by a dirty sneak like Luke Whittles, an' hoodwinked by Oregon Leon, hyar I am, twenty-five miles from the Oregon trail, with the leetle ones took from me, and so far as the

train is consarned, bu'sted. This is the time fur business an' business it is. Dandy Jack is with—thet's what I'd like to know. Why didn't he git to finish the writin'? Cuss all ov them! I'm the maddest man in Oregon! I am—Lige Butler!"

The old guide gave a wild whoop expressive of his feelings, as he sprung into the saddle, and turned to the dilapidated wagon.

"Fur ev'ry cut they guv the old wagon I'll pay 'em with intrust!" he said. "Ye carried the leetle ones cl'ar from the States, an' ye stuck to 'em as long as ye could, thet's what ye did. Now this is yer reward, cut up by the Injuns' hatchets. It makes me mad all over, I swan it does."

Gritting his teeth hard behind the last word, Long Lige drove his heels hard against the rears of his steed, and left the spot with a bound—left the old wagon to the solitude that brooded over the plain.

He hurried in a north-westerly direction, leaving the Oregon trail to his left, but having the country of the Snakes directly before him. His animal at last cast no shadow on the grass which he was leaving behind, and the shades of night swooped upon the daring man.

All at once he came to a halt, and leaning forward, thrust his cap over the mule's mouth and nostrils.

"No noise!" he said, to the animal, "we're goin' to meet somebody. Down! down in the grass, Major!"

As he uttered the command he struck the animal several light blows upon the neck, and the knees were instantly bent.

"A mule what hes been over the Oregon trail as often as you hev, knows what his business is!" murmured Lige, bestowing a proud look on the obedient brute, as he stepped lightly to the ground!

"Now, lie still, old fellow, till we see who's comin'."

The practiced ear of the guide had detected the approach of a party as yet unseen, because of the prevailing shades. Its numbers were of course unknown to him; but the sounds that now came to his ears told him that they were not inconsiderable.

Crouched beside the faithful mule, with his rifle cocked in his hand, the guide kept his eyes fixed to the north from whence at last emerged a long object, moving like a huge serpent over the plain.

"Injuns, as I 'spected. Now, if the hindmost chap is a laggard, mebbe I'll git a bit o' news."

Long Lige could not be deceived by the sight, and while he looked at the Indian band passing to his right, he quietly laid his rifle aside and drew his knife.

Then, without any further admonition to the mule to remain quiet, save a significant pat on the neck, he crept through the grass, rather long at that point, as if to intercept the last horseman. This worthy was inclined to be a laggard, for he sat astride of his little steed in an indolent attitude, the leathern lines lying carelessly on the neck of the beast, which certainly knew enough to follow the band.

The Oregon guide counted twenty-three savages as he crept forward, his hand on his knife, and his eyes on the band, but more particularly on the last man.

A distance of thirty feet intervened between the laggard and the Indian who immediately preceded him. This, for a moment, disconcerted the guide.

"I've got to make him stop," he said, to himself. "Dick Smith—Red Dick—used to jump 'em on the move, but a Piute gave him the knife once, and he never tried it afterward."

The last muttered word had hardly left Butler's lips before the low, but rapid "Cut, cut, cut," of the Sage Cock was heard. This was followed by a hollow, blowing sound, which always betrays the presence of that noble bird called the Cock of the Plains, though he seldom comes down from the mountains. The Indian heard the noise, and Lige might easily have imagined that he saw his eyes glisten with the greed of the epicure as he quickly bade his horse stop.

The red-man who will not turn from any occupation to possess himself of a good fat Sage Cock, I venture does not live in the Far West. The skin of all epicures is not white.

The horse stopped and turned his head toward the spot from whence the sound proceeded, and his rider dropped to the ground without noise, leaving the band to proceed without him.

The call was not repeated, and the savage, somewhat puzzled by the silence, seemed to be debating what course to pursue, when a dark

figure sprung through a clump of grass and bore him back.

Resistance on the Indian's part was useless, for a hand was on his wizen, and the tightening fingers were driving his eyeballs from his head.

"Thought it war a Sage Cock, eh?" cried Long Lige, victory gleaming in his eyes. "You keep up the reputation of yer tribe by bein' fond of the bird. Thar's many an Injun what has run ag'in' a knife instead of a Sage Cock. But, come along with me. I want a bit o' news, an' I guess ye can enlighten me. Oh, we'll let yer hoss stand thar; ef he's trained, he'll wait for ye till he stands to death!"

Moving back toward his own animal, Long Lige dragged his captive along.

"Now!" he said, when back to the mule again. "Now fur the catechism. Tell me whar the boy an' gal ar', fur ye ar' a Snake an' ye know."

The Indian, whose windpipe had been partially released, stared into the guide's face. It was a blank, meaningless stare.

"Oh, ye know all about it!" Lige continued. "Now ye kin open yer mouth an' talk or pass in yer checks an' git off life's train right hyar."

The Indian's response was somewhat startling. With a quickness that staggered the guide, he suddenly jerked back, actually wrenching himself loose, and, before Lige could prevent, he started toward his horse, a wild yell falling from his lips.

"That's yer last holler!" grated the old guide, and he bounded after the Snake.

The race was of short duration; the Indian, miscalculating his powers, benumbed as they were by the late hand on his throat, could not outstrip the mad man.

He saw this and turned, whipping out his tomahawk as he executed the movement.

But the gleaming iron could not disconcert the guide; he darted upon the red-skin, and as his left hand actually lifted him from the ground, his knife shot into a vital part.

There was a quiver, a death-gurgle, but no wild yell, and the Indian slipped from Butler's hands.

"No information, but a new predicament!" grated Lige, as he turned toward his own animal again. "One Indian has eaten his last Sage Cock, an' mebbe I've teched mine; but thet's to be seen!"

For a moment he looked to the South and listened. He heard the sound of hoofs.

"Jest as I 'spected! they're comin' back!" he said.

Then he struck the mule with the flat of his hand, and as the animal rose, he vaulted into the saddle!

CHAPTER VI.

"WHEN THIEVES FALL OUT, ETC."

ON the right bank of the Fayette river not many miles from its junction with the Oregon stood one of the main villages of the Snake Indians. It was composed of nine hundred lodges, all told, and could send forth, as it did at times, large parties of red marauders which when the eye of the Government was not upon them, would swoop down upon the emigrant trains and massacre young and old alike.

A large percentage of the Snake nation was at the period of which we write in a state of hostility toward the United States. They were giving the authorities at Washington no inconsiderable amount of vexation, for their acts threatened to mar the peace which existed between the Government and other tribes contiguous to the Snakes. To this state of affairs a white man named Leon Marteveld, of Spanish descent, was believed to have contributed. By some means which would not place certain living ex-officials in an enviable public light if made known, he had been appointed Indian Agent, with headquarters at Fort Boise. Marteveld had all the elements of rascality imbedded in his nature, and the shrewd observers soon noticed that one of the most deplorable of appointments had been made.

The Indians were cheated without stint or mercy by this man, whom, strange to say, they almost worshiped, and in secret conclave made him a chief after the usual ceremonies. This last affair reached the Governmental ears; and Leon Marteveld was officially decapitated. Hundreds of lives would have been saved if this consummate villain had never received the appointment which he disgraced; he at once, after his overthrow, proceeded to charge all of his own chicanery upon the Government, firing the savage heart until the Oregon trail became one great deathway, and his own name banditized by the *sobriquet* of Oregon Leon.

The Government had offered a good reward for his capture, and the commandants of the

several forts in that country were constantly on the look-out for him. But he was a cunning fellow of many tricks and disguises, and in all the Snake nation on the Fayette there was not to be found one man who would betray him to the troops.

If Long Lige had known that the person who saluted him as we have seen on the Oregon trail was that worthy, we are certain that some chapters in this romance had never been written.

It was into the Snake village already mentioned that a white man proclaimed that he had nothing to fear from the inhabitants. His coming did not create any excitement; no person started at his entrance, save a man who was also white. This latter personage was clad in the rough but serviceable garments of a western teamster; he was sour of countenance, as if he had been "crossed" in the midst of some triumph.

"Oregon at last!" he ejaculated, starting forward as he recognized the new-comer. "I'm deuced glad somebody's comin', what has a white face. I could never git along with these greasers, an' since they've got the best of me in the last affair, I hate them like a snake hates the fire. Cuss them! He's lookin' sour, too, Oregon is. The Injuns hev made me des'prit. I've tried to do my duty, an' if he growls, I'll cheat somebody out o' his prize."

The last words muttered with tigerish fierceness under his breath welled from the man's ill-natured heart, as he advanced to greet the western bandit who had slackened his gait.

"Well, by Jove!" exclaimed Marteveld drawing rein suddenly and looking at Luke Whittles, now at his horse's side. "I didn't expect to find you here after seein' the wagon overturned empty as a fool's head, and with half a dozen dead Indians lyin' nigh."

"You see'd all that?" Whittles said half questioningly. "Well, p'raps, ef they hedn't deserted me they'd 'a' fared better."

"The blue-coats, eh?" grated Leon, shutting his lips firmly behind the last word, for he hated the soldiers as only men of his stripe can hate their hunters.

"Soldiers? no! The boy—Dandy Jack—wiped out some of them; but they run agin' a snag called Sun-Dance. P'raps you've heard of him."

There was a twinkle of grim humor in Whittles's eyes, as he spoke, and he saw Oregon Leon's cheeks grow white, and the blood retreating leave his lips.

"Yes; but I don't fear him any more, Luke," Leon said. "How did the wagon and the Indians get away from you, for I infer from your talk that you joined them, and claim that they deserted you?"

"I claim the truth; understand that!" flashed the traitor, darting a fierce look at the bandit; and cooling down somewhat, he told the story of his theft of the team and its inmates, his gallop across the plains, his encounter with the Indians, the mysterious box, and Dandy Jack's coup d'état.

"When they started after the wagon they left me standin' in the gramma grass, not one red skunk offerin' to take me up, though thar war twenty hosses in the party what would carry double, an' carry it well, too. They didn't want me along; they thought thar war gold somewhar in the wagon, and they didn't want a white finger to tech it. They got in yesterday, an' I—I got here this mornin'—mad as a March hare; an' hev been quarrelin' with the devils ever since."

"Just as if you place no value on your life," said Leon, rebukingly. "Be careful, Luke. If they get riled against you, even I cannot do you any good."

"What are you a chief fur if you can't see thar a fellar what has stole fur you is protected?"

There was a cutting sarcasm in the teamster's emphasis, and before Oregon Leon could reply, he continued:

"Not only hev I stole for you, but I've had a box of niter glisserene jolting behind me fur twenty-four hours, to say nothin' of carryin' it clear from the Bluffs. An' now you say you 'can't perfect' me if the Injuns get riled agin' me. Can't? Yer don't want to, Oregon Leon, an' by the soul of my mother! I'm not goin' to ask it!"

The eyes of Luke Whittles flashed like fiery sparks as he finished, and his rough hand fell like a hammer by way of emphasis upon the bandit's leg.

"The girl is yonder!" he continued, pointing to a large lodge whose exterior gave it a certain savage dignity. "The boy—well, Sun-Dance carried him off, which is not the last of him, I

fancy. Whar's Lige? Hev ye see'd anythin' of the old chap?"

"I saw an' talked with him. If he catches you there'll be a general settlement of accounts."

The look and voice of Oregon Leon told that he had a temper not second in bitterness to the teamster's.

"A general settlement, eh?" sneered Luke. "What will thar be when he gits his fingers on you?"

The teamster, whose visage told that anger was getting the best of him, turned abruptly from the bandit. The parting look full of hate told that the two men had a gulf of madness, of passion, between them.

Marteveld did not reply to Luke's last thrust, but rode away and presently dismounted near the entrance of the lodge to which his attention had been called.

"Go in an' see the girl what you hired me to steal for you!" grated Whittles who was covertly watching the white chief. "I've been a fool, but I kin be a man, an' one of the worst devils in these parts. Before to-morrer mornin', Oregon Leon, you'll hire some sneakin' Injun to give me a knife in the back, fur I see it in yer evil eye. To-morrer mornin', eh? You'd better catch me nappin', if you kin, long afore thet an' drop me without ceremony, fur this very night I'm goin' to show you how thunder-in' mean Luke Whittles kin be!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE "MEANNESS."

THE tent which Oregon Leon entered was not actually guarded; but the sharp eyes of several Indians not far away were fastened upon it.

Luke Whittles waited till he saw the curtains which served as a door fall behind the bandit, and then walked moodily away.

"Yes, play with the bird while you kin, Leon, fer when the mornin' comes the cage might be empty."

The object that greeted the ex-agent's eyes was one of singular beauty, and it was with difficulty that he repressed an exclamation of mingled admiration and delight.

He was confronted by a young girl, barely sixteen, whose confusion told that she had risen from a couch of skins at his entrance. She was slightly above the medium hight, fresh and lovely. Her eyes, large and lustrous, burned with a bright light beneath the long black lashes, and the hand that brushed several truant strands of dark hair back from her intellectual brow, was white and perfect.

While her garments were neat, they exhibited traces of travel. She blushed slightly when Marteveld noticed them.

"What! do I find you a captive?" he said, feigning astonishment, which made the girl regard him with a curious stare.

"I am thus situated!" she answered, disappointing him as was evident by not coming forward and throwing her fortunes at his feet. "In the first place we, Dandy Jack and I, were stolen from the care of our guide by a traitor called Whittles, and driven straight to the Indians. It was the work of a dastard, a man lost to honor and dignity."

"This traitor, Whittles, deserves condign punishment!"

"The man was comparatively blameless, compared with the fiend who is at the bottom of the outrage," said Estil, quickly, and with flashing eyes.

"Oh, then you think the teamster, for I suppose Whittles served you in that capacity, was hired to play the traitor?"

"Undoubtedly he was hired, and that by a man who is known in these parts as Oregon Leon."

The bandit, despite his self-possession, quailed before the accusing girl.

"This man—"

"Do not speak until you answer this question," she cried, suddenly putting out her hand. "Are you not that man—that bandit who has made the old Oregon trail a highway of death?"

"Girl, if I am he, I am not lost to manhood. They have lied basely on Oregon Leon, as they choose to call him; he is the most slandered man in the West; but since they have deliberately made him a devil, he is going to sustain the character."

He came nearer as the last sentence fell from his lips, and Estil, with a sudden light of recognition in her eyes, sprung aside.

"Great heavens! I know you now!" she cried.

"You are more to me than Oregon Leon. I count you the greatest villain on earth. It was you who came to the States six months ago with a letter which you said was given into your

hands by my mother. That letter told me to leave uncle Harold and fly to her arms, and you, George Dare then, urged me to go; you told me that she in the new home on the coast was anxious to see me! I believed you, and left with the train that set out for the gold country. You engaged Luke Whittles to drive our train; in the States your men plotted that treason which that villain so successfully carried out. Is this not true? Do not dare to deny your infamy, when in Oregon Leon, the villainous Indian agent and prairie bandit, I see George Dare, who drew me into this country with a lie."

The ex-agent whose face wore a sinister smile while Estil spoke began to exhibit the heartless triumph of the practiced knave.

"Who said I would deny it?" he suddenly cried. "What is the use since I stand before you as George Dare?"

"Villain!"

"I've gotten use to that name!" he said with a coarse laugh. "The cognomens given me by my white brethren are very choice, I assure you. Not very long ago it was the Honorable Leon Marteveld; now it is bandit, fiend, devil! Choice names, are they not, my captive bird?"

The flashing of the brigand's eyes was enough to blanch the cheeks of any girl, and drive her back. But Estil did not quail; above her white cheeks her eyes sparkled brilliantly like coals of fire.

"And that letter was a forgery? My mother never wrote it?"

"Never!" he said in a tone that was intended to tantalize her. "Let me tell you something. I saw that mother less than a year ago, and, captivated by her beauty, for beautiful she is, I laid siege to her heart. She did not know me. If I thought you would ever see her again, I would tell you to ask her if she has forgotten George Dare. At first I thought my suit was received with favor. She told me about you, her youngest child in the States; but she said that she would not send for you until you were of age—two years yet, I think. When I asked for her hand I was refused in such a manner as to make me mad. She would not listen to my pleadings, and at last with her finger pointed toward the door told me to leave her sight forever. I left, but before I turned on my heel to quit her presence, I told her that some day I would be terribly revenged. She became incensed, and had me arrested for making threats. But I had friends there who aided me in my escape. It became known that I was Oregon Leon, and they followed me to the boundary of the Snake country. But I eluded all, nor did I stop until I had induced you, her daughter, to seek her arms. Luke Whittles was my traitor. I proclaim it boldly now, Estil, for you are in the center of an Indian village, where the word of George Dare is law. By my soul! you're going to exceed your mother in beauty. You will not be so tall as her, but your figure will be queenlier, like that of the reigning Washington belle, Miss Comstock."

For a moment after the bandit finished the astonished girl did not speak. But her eyes never left the white Snake.

"You have confessed to villainy which should bring the blush of shame to your cheeks!" she cried at length. "I now know the motive that prompted that letter to which my mother's name was forged. But let me tell you here and now, bandit and butcherer, that your villainy whatever it be shall not succeed."

"Ho! ho! my tigress!" said Leon with the coarse laugh of the ruffian. "And pray whose arm is going to be stretched between you and me—that weak and pretty one of yours?"

"This one at least!" Estil answered lifting her right arm.

"I can push it aside as if it were a reed!"

"Not if there be a knife at the end of it!"

"A knife? I fancy that you will get to handle such an article while you are here!"

"Do you think I cannot?" cried the girl defiantly, and before the bandit could stop her, she stooped and drew a long-bladed hunting-knife from beneath the pillow of the couch.

Marteveld greeted the weapon with an oath of surprise.

Estil's eyes danced behind the glittering steel which she held up before his eyes.

"Who gave you that?"

"I do not betray!" was the answer, which seemed only to madden him.

"It is an Indian knife and it has been given to you."

"That is true."

"The man who gave it is without such a weapon now. Ha! I see buck-horn handle, with red notches in it. 'Twill not be very hard

to find the scamp. I'll see that he never does you another favor, and the sooner the better."

He moved to the door as he spoke.

"You may find him, but with all your authority you dare not punish," flashed the girl.

"Dare not? Where is the Indian whom I dare not strike? Why, girl, I would not stop short of War-Bow himself, and I know it is not his knife."

"It is not his!" Estil said. "Find its owner if you can!"

"I will! But what will you do before I carry out my plans against your mother—not against you, girl, for it is she I hate?"

"First, what are those plans?"

"Now, think for a moment what would strike her deepest. Your mother loves you; there is one thing which would kill her quicker than the news of your death."

With a wild cry Estil started toward the man.

"That event shall never happen!" she cried, holding the flashing knife between them. "It would kill my mother. Do not attempt to carry out such a plan as that."

"So you have guessed it. Why, it would make you queen of the Snakes. Queen Estil! think how that would sound! But, what will you do to oppose it? Now, throw a glamour of romance upon your situation, and say that sooner than become my wife you'd bury that red-notched knife in your heart."

"No sir!" cried the girl. "Suicide is cowardly! There is another heart that may feel the point of this knife. Do not provoke me."

"It is my heart?"

"It is yours!"

He looked at the defiant girl for a moment, and then with some words which she could not understand, he sprang from the lodge and the falling curtains hid him from her sight.

It was dark when Leon Martevilde found himself once again upon the street, if street the way that ran between the long row of Indian wigwams could be called. Night had followed the twilight and a few fitting figures could be seen.

The trail bandit did not look behind him as he hurried away, consequently he did not see the two statue-like figures which stood on either side of the wigwam. They were stalwart Indian guards, and had taken their positions unknown to him.

"To find the man who gave her the knife, that's my first duty," muttered Oregon Leon. "War-Bow is not likely to return for several days, and I am the king now. By heaven! somebody shall feel my authority, too."

Several hours later the ex-agent entered his own lodge and lighted a candle, a small portion of the plunder taken from some hapless train.

His face wore a puzzled expression; it was evident that his hunt for the owner of the buckhorn handle knife had proved fruitless.

"If I did not find him I did one good thing," he said aloud. "There'll be a dead white man in this village before daylight. Luke Whittles, I've a terrible way of paying my debts."

"Oh, I'll cancel them now!"

The harsh and sudden voice made Oregon Leon start back and seize the revolver which he had taken from his belt a few short moments before.

Luke Whittles held a heavy teamster's whip in his hand.

"Yes, I'll cancel 'em afore I go!" he cried, fiendishly raising the murderous whip, intent upon beating his enemy down with the butt. "Can't perfect me, eh? Well, I'm not goin' to ask ye!"

It was in vain that Oregon Leon tried to ward off the whip, and use his pistol. Down came the heavy stock, knocking the pistol to the further side of the lodge, and then two terrible blows, dealt in startling succession, sent the bandit reeling backward, bloody, and, perhaps, dead.

"I promised to be mean to ye afore mornin'!" grated Whittles, looking for a moment at his work. "Now I'll finish my work."

He took the revolver which had fallen from Martevilde's hand and thrust it into his belt beside one already there, and flung the whip across the body of his victim.

Then he extinguished the light and went out.

"A new way to settle troublesome accounts!" he said to himself, with a light but brutish chuckle.

He moved away in the direction of Estil's prison, with a cocked revolver in his right hand.

The sky was studded with stars, and the night was clear.

Luke stopped suddenly and put his ear to the ground.

"Nothin' comin'!" he muttered, as he rose. "Them dogs keep an infernal racket up down by the hosses."

To the right, and seemingly just beyond the confines of the village, a lot of Indian dogs were making the night hideous.

As Luke Whittles heard them he gritted his teeth in anger.

"A Piute among the animiles, mebbe," he muttered.

A Piute? No! If Luke had known the truth the dogs might have interested him more than they did.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FATAL THROW.

"WHITE boy watch here!"

The speaker was Sun-Dance the Tlamath, and as he uttered the last word he thrust the leathern bridle of his horse into Dandy Jack's hand.

"I'd like to go along!" said the boy, taking the bridle reluctantly, and giving the red-skin a look full of earnest desire, but Sun-Dance shook his head.

"One better than two, sometimes!" he said. "Jack watch the horses, an' bymby Sun-Dance come back with Stolen Flower."

"Be very careful," admonished the boy. "We made a good deal of racket among the horses, and Leon is in the village. Very careful, Indian; we've got our heads in the lion's mouth, and if the jaws close, it is good-by!"

"Sun-Dance been here before," and the Tlamath gliding away, left the boy on the riverbank, and not far from the edge of the Snake village.

He held in his hand the reins belonging to three horses, two of which had been adroitly stolen from the Indian corral.

It was the presence of the pair which had irritated the dogs, but the theft would not be betrayed. The only Indian lured to the place by the noise had died without a shriek with the hatchet of the Tlamath in his brain.

Dandy Jack's proposition to rescue Estil from the midst of the Snake village, a deed of daring scarcely without a parallel, found an eager listener in Sun-Dance, whose sympathies had been enlisted in the cause. The young chief was an inveterate enemy of the Snakes, hating them with all the hatred of the savage. He had been a thorn in the nation's side, had time and again stampeded their horses from the very suburbs of their habitation, and butchered their sleeping warriors in the night. As the red bandit of the plains, Sun-Dance was a demon, feared almost as much as he was hated by his foes.

It had been with difficulty that he restrained his hands from stampeding the restless horses when he selected two from the herd. The thought of Estil to be rescued that night, alone had prevented the panic.

"Here I am the companion of an Indian," murmured Dandy Jack, finding himself alone beneath the myriads of stars that glittered brilliantly above. "We're in the greatest peril, and getting our hands in deeper and deeper all the time. Thus far I've found Sun-Dance a brave, good-natured fellow; but, mercy, how his eyes flash whenever I talk about Oregon Leon and the Snakes. If they knew he was here now, right in their village, there'd be one of the biggest times imaginable."

The figure of the Indian disappeared while Dandy Jack thus communed with himself, and he grew silent and listened.

The occasional bark of an Indian dog was the only sound that broke the stillness; the horses were quiet again, for they could not snuff the odor of the scarlet thief.

Sun-Dance moved cautiously into the village, crawling at times like a sneaking wolf, and now rising erect.

He was in the midst of his inveterate foes, the sworn enemies of his tribe. The lodges did not stand near each other; there was a space of twenty feet between them, and across this the Tlamath glided with practiced caution. The keen eye of the dog might discover him, or the attention of a warrior seal his doom.

The absence of the large war-parties was a fortuitous circumstance; but keen eyes still remained in the village; the survivors of the battle by the Conestoga were at home.

The anxious glances which Sun-Dance cast over his left shoulder told that he was watching the horizon growing light, as the moon, still unseen, pursued her course through the sky.

What was to be accomplished must not be finished in the moonlight; it would betray him.

It was while Sun-Dance crept through the village of his foes that the incidents related in the foregoing chapter took place. Intent upon

taking revenge, Luke Whittles had entered Oregon Leon's tent, and struck him down with the heavy handle of his whip. Then eager to carry out the entire plan of his meanness he sought the tent or lodge occupied by Estil.

Toward this Sun-Dance also was gliding, each unaware of the other's presence.

Whittles was approaching the lodge from the west, or from behind, while the Tlamath, crawling from the east, was nearing the door.

The shadows of the many wigwams, long ones and dark, for they were thrown by the stars, prevented the would-be rescuers from seeing each other, and the single guard, if the dark figure crouched dog-like at the front of the lodge was an Indian, seemed also ignorant of their presence.

It would have been apparent to any one who could have watched this double crawl from overhead, that Whittles's movements would bring him to the guard first.

He was crawling around the lodge, knife in hand, and hugging the shadows like an assassin, but with outstretched neck to keep the guard in sight.

"The Injun 'pears to be asleep," he murmured, with satisfaction glittering in his evil eyes. "By George! I'm in luck to-night. I've finished Leon, for if I didn't crush his skull with the whip, I don't know how to strike, an' here I find a sleepin' Injun guardin' the lodge. Luck! luck, Luke Whittles; a thunderin' sight more'n you desearve!"

Nearer and nearer to the guard he crawled, and at last, when but five feet intervened, he stopped.

For a moment he seemed to be studying the position of the careless sentry, and then with a sudden spring he darted upon him.

It was at this moment that Sun-Dance became aware of the traitor's presence.

Until that time he had flattered himself that the giant was to become his victim.

Duke Whittles had not miscalculated the distance, for he alighted squarely upon the guard. There was a sharp, angry growl as the traitor struck fiercely as he came down, and the guard springing up, threw him off.

"Thunder and guns!" gasped Whittles, as he was hurled back with a force that seemed to break every bone in his body. "Not an Injun, but a b'ar!"

Truer words had never fallen from his lips.

The guard of the lodge was an enormous bear, which, sorely wounded by the long knife, was springing forward.

Luke lost no time in scrambling to his feet, and he quickly drew a revolver.

"Shoot 'em? No!" he cried, hesitating. "I don't want the hull Snake nation down upon me. It's a b'ar an' no mistake, an' if I want the gal I've got to meet 'im with the knife."

For a moment man and bear eyed each other like gladiators in the ring. Luke saw that a giant of the cinnamon species faced him; and recollected that he had caught several glimpses of the animal in the village during the day.

"I'd rather face six Snakes!" he grated.

"But the b'ar is between me an' my object, so here goes."

He darted aside as he spoke for the purpose of disconcerting the animal, and Bruin turning half-way round prepared to meet the threatened attack.

"Face to face then, hang ye!" cried Whittles, and like a thunderbolt he cast his body straight at the brute.

Quick as his attack was, the bear prepared to receive him, and was rising on his hind feet when Luke's left arm flung the fore paws aside and delivered a murderous blow at the throat.

This staggered the bear, and before he could recover the traitor dealt two more blows with all his might. At the last one the knife went to the heart, for the heavy carcass rolled back and fell at the very door of the lodge.

"Good luck yet!" exclaimed Luke as he sprang over the bear. "Now I'll finish the work."

He was at the wigwam and looked up to see a white face between the curtain and a pair of eyes full of wonderment were fixed upon him.

"Ha! my beauty!" he cried, and the next moment he had torn the curtains aside and seized upon the captive.

"Never mind, I'm goin' to take you out o' this red nest. Yes, yes, I'm Luke Whittles. I've got b'ar blood on my face an' I don't look like myself."

"Luke Whittles, the traitor!" gasped Estil, shutting her eyes to keep out the vision of his abhorred countenance.

"Yes, the traitor!" he said with a sneer. "An' I wasn't paid fur doin' it, either."

The girl could not struggle, for the teamster's great hands held her frail body captive and his short rough beard seemed to cut her delicate cheek.

"Now fur the hoss!" he said in a low tone, and he left the empty lodge and dead bear.

But he was followed; that silent figure which had approached the lodge from the river crept after the girl-thief. The eye of the Tlamath never left Luke Whittles; but followed him to the southern side of the village where a horse was tethered by means of a lariat to a small cottonwood.

The presence of the tree told that the river flowed not far away.

There was something in the Tlamath's hands now which was not a knife. Well might it resemble a coil of rope, for it was a lariat.

He saw Luke reach the horse which he loosened with his left hand while he held the girl with the right.

Slowly the Tlamath rose and the noose end of the hairy rope made several rapid circles around his feathered head then it shot forward like the Araucanian bola, and dropped over the traitor's head.

Luke Whittles uttered a cry of horror as the infernal cord touched him. His hand was on the animal's neck ready for mounting, but notwithstanding his surprise he did not release the mane.

The lasso was yet slack, nor did it tighten until he threw himself upon the horse. Then it contracted its embrace, pinioning his arms to his side, and binding the half-conscious girl to him.

But his hands were free, and they gripped the rein with a gripe which no human strength could shatter.

He did not stop to ascertain the identity of the thrower; the lasso was fastened about him, that was enough, and as he had not heard the sound of hoofs he guessed that the foe had stolen upon him on foot.

"Gosh hang it! you can't jerk me any worse nor I kin you!" he said. "Hup the cord is tied to yer body. I'll drag ye along, ner quit till I've killed ye!"

He spoke fiercely to the horse and struck the rowels mercilessly with the huge Spanish spurs which in those days were at every muleteer's heels, and with a snort of pain the animal started forward.

All this in the space of half a minute!

Luke Whittles did not look back to see the dark figure plant itself like a statue, for the force at the other end of the lasso threatened to unhorse him.

But only for a moment.

The thrower could not hold his prey.

He tried it madly for a moment and then was jerked forward by the animal's start.

Sun-Dance fell on his face, nor did he rise after the *contretemps*, but if he was conscious he found himself being dragged over the ground not very far behind the horse's heels!

The lasso was fastened to his wrist, and he was making frantic efforts to cut it with his knife.

But in vain; he was doomed to a terrible death.

On, on, went Luke Whittles, the lasso cutting into his arms as it were and the Indian bounding like a rubber ball behind him.

All at once Dandy Jack heard the coming horse and started up.

The sound grew more and more distinct, and suddenly, like some hideous specter, the traitor went thundering by!

Jack dropped the bridles and shrunk back with a cry of horror, and the horses, frightened no less than he, left him alone.

He saw the apparition disappear down the river-trail, and caught sight of a shapeless object which it seemed to be dragging behind it.

In a moment all had left his sight, and he went forward to see if his eyes had deceived him.

The moonlight was now beginning to illumine the spot, and Dandy Jack saw a dark object on the ground.

Picking it up he held it in the light.

It was a broken feather—one of the Tlamath's. "Great Caesar! Sun-Dance had the lasso fastened to his wrist! I am deserted now!"

At this moment a wild cry rose apparently from the center of the Snake village.

It was answered by a hundred yells.

Dandy Jack felt his blood getting cold!

CHAPTER IX.

DANDY JACK MEETS UGLY BEAR.

"I AM deserted now!"

There was a terrible meaning attached to these words as they fell from Dandy Jack's lips.

Deserted and on foot at the edge of a hostile village, the boy's situation was anything but pleasant and safe.

The horses lately stolen from the Indian corral as well as the Tlamath's faithful steed had taken to their heels at the sight of the apparition which had just thundered by, and Dandy Jack's only weapons consisted of Sun-Dance's repeating rifle left with him, and his own revolver.

There was something wild and unnatural in the yell which had startled him; it was full of agony and bloodthirstiness.

"It's no use to stay here and get caught. The village is full of life now. My only hope is to find a hiding-place along the river—till the search is over."

The noises in the village would have suggested self preservation to any person in Jack's situation, and with a weapon in each hand he turned toward the river.

But he did not pass beyond the moonlight before he came to a sudden halt.

A horse was galloping from the north and the patter of the hoofs had a familiar sound.

"Little River is coming back!" cried the boy taking hope at the sounds. "Truly this seems providential. I wonder if he didn't get ashamed of himself for deserting me?"

Knowing well that the horse coming rapidly toward him was the animal which belonged to Sun-Dance, Dandy Jack turned back to bring him to a halt.

His brief companionship with the Tlamath had familiarized him to no little extent with the animal's habits, as well as with the Indian's manner of treating him.

A peculiar whistle would bring Little River to a sudden halt, and Jack would have nothing to do but to vault upon his back and give him the rein before his enemies discovered him.

"The other horses are with Little River! 'Tis strange they did not go back to the corral."

But notwithstanding the presence of another horse close behind Little River, Jack proceeded to carry out his plans.

The river trail, a well-beaten track and evidently much traveled by the Snakes, was alternately shadow and light. When the on-coming horses were invisible the sound of their hoofs proclaimed their whereabouts.

Little River was some distance in advance of his follower when a singular whistle brought him to a sudden halt, which would have sent a carelessly seated rider on his head.

"Thank heaven for you, Little River!" exclaimed the boy, springing to the horse's side.

He laid his hand on the mane and was about to vault upon the blanketed back, when something dark and rough grazed his face and settled down over the horse's head!

Dandy Jack started back with a cry of horror, and Little River bounded away as the lasso tightened around his superb neck, but he was jerked suddenly from the ground and unceremoniously thrown upon his side.

"Flintlocks and fire!" ejaculated the little adventurer, as he turned to see the strange horse firmly planted on the trail with his great breast full and his noble head erect holding taut the lasso wrapped around the saddle-horn. There was victory in the beast's eye.

But the sign of a foe was not visible.

"A horse can't throw a lasso!" muttered the boy, recovering from the mystification of the scene. "There's an Indian somewhere, and I'm going to find him."

He cocked his rifle as he spoke, and started boldly toward the horse.

"Surrender!" he shouted to the unseen foe. "Surrender, I say, or I'll fill you full of moonlight in the blink of an eye!"

There was no reply. The majestic horse turned his head as if he understood the boy.

"Behind the horse, Indian-like. But I'll make you show yourself."

The rifle leaped to Jack's shoulders, and taking a hasty but deliberate aim, he touched the trigger. At the clear report, that echoed far and wide, the horse reeled back on his haunches and then fell heavily to the ground, shot through the brain.

But no foe was yet seen!

The boy was now mystified.

"Bless me! if I don't find out who threw that lasso, if I get caught in so doing," he said, in a tone which exhibited a doggedness of spirit out of place then and there, when flight might yet save.

The horse had fallen dead, and Little River, startled by the rifle-shot, was upon his feet trying to wrench the lasso from the saddle-bow.

Jack hastened toward the dead steed as much intent upon relieving the Tlamath's horse as to discover his unseen foe.

A few bounds brought him to his victim's side. He lay in the tallest grass visible to the boy, a stream of blood flowing from his mouth, but his great heart still.

"It is very queer!" said Jack, seeing nothing. "Hark! there are a dozen or more coming. I'll loosen Little River and outrun them with the critter!"

There was no time left to inquire into the mystery of the throw which had so startlingly arrested his flight, and Jack thrust his hand over the steed's side to unfasten the lasso, for knife, at that moment, he did not possess.

His fingers felt the saddle-horn, and then began to uncoil the hairy rope, but they suddenly stopped.

For a hand seized his wrist stealthily, but with the suddenness of a serpent's spring, and the boy, as he recoiled with a cry of horror, saw the owner of that hand raise himself suddenly over the carcass.

The head and shoulders of a Snake Indian, and the glittering eyes of a cunning warrior!

Dandy Jack's only free hand leaped to the revolver in his belt, but it was gripped half-way and he felt himself in the power of his foe.

"White boy too many shootin'-irons; Ugly Bear none, so he hide when he throw lasso, and fell over with horse," said the Indian, with a grin.

Dandy Jack did not reply. He looked at his captor and acknowledged that he was fairly caught.

"That Sun-Dance's hoss!" said Ugly Bear, whose face certainly sustained the merits of the appellation. "Injun know it from Oregon to Kooskoosky. Where is the Tlamath?"

"Don't ask me?" said Jack.

"With him white boy come hither. Sun-Dance save him at the wagon."

"You were there, then?"

The Snake nodded.

"We're old acquaintances," Jack said, with a smile. "It's impossible to shake hands with you, seeing the fix I'm in."

"Bad fix!" said Ugly Bear, sententiously. "But where Sun-Dance?"

There was a menace in the Snake's tone.

"A fellow can't tell a thing he doesn't know, can he?"

"But white boy know. He trying to fool Ugly Bear."

"That's downright lying!" flashed Jack, his eyes sparkling with indignation. "I don't know; but that settles it, and if I did know, I wouldn't tell you!"

For a moment the Indian looked at his captive in a manner in which Jack did not relish. He felt the gripe on his arms growing tighter and tighter, and all at once he was jerked over the carcass to the side occupied by the Snake, and brought up standing almost against his captor's face.

"Ugly Bear could jerk white boy's bones out!" said the Indian.

"If that was a specimen of your jerking I'm not going to doubt you," answered Dandy Jack. "But what are you going to do with me?"

"Listen!" said Ugly Bear. "White boy hear the horses?"

"Yes, they've got into the trail again; they were off awhile ago."

"On again! What name?"

The Snake was looking curiously into Jack's face.

"Jack!" said the captive.

"Jack! Jack!" repeated Ugly Bear. "Big Injun called Captain Jack up north. Here come the Snakes. Been huntin' fur the crawlin' thief, who kill bear an' steal girl."

There was something in the last sentence which needed explanation to Dandy Jack and he was about to question Ugly Bear when that worthy leaped upon the dead horse and with his face turned toward the as yet unseen riders gave a peculiar whoop.

It was answered, and the answer twenty times repeated made the welkin ring.

Soon a dozen dark figures burst into the moonlight and Jack saw them bearing down upon him.

The Snake was in great glee. He danced upon the side of his slain horse, and all at once thrust his captive above his head and cried out with the devilishness of a fiend.

"Whoop! Ugly Bear catch 'im! Catch the white boy of the wagon. Jack! Jack! Jack!"

On, on came the Indians, and Dandy Jack saw them draw rein around him and heard their exclamations of delight.

"Ugly Bear catch 'im!" repeated the gratified captor as he shook the boy in his companions' faces.

"Ugly Bear give 'im up!" responded a deep, guttural voice; but the Snake, shrunk from the red arm which was outstretched with authority.

"No! no! him shoot Ugly Bear's hoss."

"It is War-Bow who speaks!"

The snake hesitated a moment longer, and then as he shut his lips hard he flung the boy at the stalwart speaker.

Jack was a second in the air, and then a great red arm strong as a bar of steel was thrown around him.

He was in the embrace of War-Bow, the vindictive chief of the hostile Snakes!

CHAPTER X.

THREE AGAINST ONE.

THE young captive was soon to learn the import of Ugly Bear's words, "Kill bear and steal girl."

His entrance into the Snake village proper was not long delayed after he found himself in the arms of War-Bow. When the Indians turned their attention to the horse which their comrade had lassoed, they found him fretful and impatient to be free.

A young buck sprung from his horse and unloosed the lariat, but Ugly Bear who thought that he was going to appropriate the Tlamath's handsome steed to his own use, darted upon him with an ejaculation of rage and flung him back.

The push sent the buck against the dead horse, and as he fell the *lazo* was pulled from his hand.

Little River had started forward again, this time to find himself free, and before a scarlet hand could reseize the cord, the noble horse was almost out of sight.

"Let 'im go! No catch 'im!" said War-Bow waving back the would-be pursuer with his hand, and then the party returned to the village.

There as I have intimated Dandy Jack had the words "Kill bear and steal girl" explained to him. He learned that Luke Whittles and not Sun-Dance had carried Estil off, and the two persons on the horse which had darted past his station like a specter now stood revealed.

But what disastrous *contretemps* had caused Sun-Dance to be dragged at the horse's heels?

This was the mystery which now puzzled the boy.

War-Bow and his party were in the act of entering the village at the time of the theft, hence their presence on the scene to Dandy Jack's discomfiture.

The "town" was now a scene of wild activity; the Indian killed by Sun-Dance at the corral had been discovered, and the savage lamentations over the corpse were hideous and disgusting. Every dog in the place was awake, adding to the Bedlamic din.

The dead bear, a great favorite, as was easily seen, had been dragged to the square-shaped spot in the center of the town, and laid beside the dead brave. The "square" was filled with savages of all ages, and the two sexes; they mingled their groans, curses, and terrible threats, and Dandy Jack involuntarily shrunk nearer to the broad breast of War-Bow, as he was led to the spot.

The crowd made way for the cavalcade, and strained its eyes to see what the chief held in his arms. For a moment they seemed to think that Sun-Dance had fallen into the clutches of the band, and the Terror's name began to be heard on every side; but when they discovered that the captive's face was white, disgust took the place of triumph.

"Where is Oregon?" cried War-Bow, looking through the crowd for the man whose name he uttered with a half-concealed sneer.

"Here!" was the reply, and a man clad in civilized garments came forward.

The accent proclaimed the speaker a white man, but his face was enough to make one doubt it.

The work of Luke Whittles's heavy whip was easy to see. The bandit's face resembled that of a pugilist, who unfortunately gets his head in chancery, and is brutally pounded. His features were not recognizable; the eyes were almost shut; the whole face swollen and bloody, and one of his ears apparently forced into the skull.

"Oh, you've got the little devil!" said Martavelde, disappointed at seeing the boy. "The real scamp—that Luke Whittles, has escaped. War-Bow, I want to kill something white. Throw the young fighting-cock down here, and I'll string him on my knife."

"White boy War-Bow's captive!" said the chief, looking into the hideous face, not relieved by the flashing eyes far behind the cut cheeks.

"Keep him, then!" hissed Leon. "I won't

interfere in your sport. Who is following the thief?"

"Nobody. He will not bother us any more, and Sun-Dance is going through the grass for the last time."

Oregon Leon gave the chief a malicious look, and bit his swollen lip.

"Oh, curse you, you old villain!" he muttered under his breath. "I'll pay you for all this. Bless me if I don't show you the biggest pile of ashes you ever saw, and that before long, too!"

He turned madly on his heel as he uttered the last sentence, and touched an old savage, fantastically dressed.

"Come and help doctor my face," he said. "The numbness is leaving it now, and I feel as if I had been pounded with a hammer. I wonder if he did all of it with a whip. We'll meet again, Luke Whittles, and then—then it will not be a whip!"

He staggered rather than walked through the crowd, which respectively made way for him, followed by the medicine man.

The eyes of War-Bow went after the bandit. There was a glitter in them which seemed to say, "You can lord it over the warriors, but not over me!"

Then, at the chief's command, a fire was kindled in the square, and soon the place was illuminated. This artificial light was hardly needed, for the full moon was up now, and the light fell uninterrupted upon the Snake village. As the flames shot upward the crowd drew back and mechanically formed a circle.

War-Bow advanced to the center, and in a quick, sharp tone called several names which Dandy Jack did not catch.

In an instant the chief's calls were answered, and three Indian boys sprung into the arena with the suppleness of young acrobats.

They darted toward War-Bow, and shook their fists at Dandy Jack, at the same time darning him in the Indian tongue to the combat.

"Fight?" said War-Bow, looking at our hero, in whose eyes resentment flashed. "One at a time, Little Fox-Tail, Kingfisher and Red Jack-Rabbit."

Dandy Jack did not reply for a moment.

"They never hurt me!" he said, at length. War-Bow, with a grin, turned to the crowd and seemed to explain Jack's reply, for there were guttural exclamations and the clapping of hands.

"Fight, whether they ever hurt white boy or not!" he said, suddenly, and the next instant Jack found himself slipping from the chief's gripe.

He landed right before the three young pugilists, and War-Bow drew back to the human circle.

With a quick glance the young captive measured the Indian boys from head to foot. They were about his height, strong, athletic and supple, and their large arms glistened in a profusion of bear's grease.

For a moment Jack seemed to stand bewildered before them, and all at once they began to crouch like game-cocks, and to beat their sides with their arms, as if they were wings. The spectators, immensely pleased, looked on, applauding the young Snakes, but hissing the white boy.

"One at a time!" War-Bow suddenly cried. "The Red Jack-Rabbit will fight the boy first. Let Little Fox-Tail and Kingfisher stand back!"

The two last named boys heard the chief and reluctantly stepped back. Jack stood before the Red Jack Rabbit, the strongest, if there were any difference of the three.

The red boy's eyes were mild, they did not flash with the vindictiveness of the Indian, there was much humor in Red Jack Rabbit.

"I can't get out of the fight!" Dandy Jack said to himself, as he surveyed his antagonist, who stood ready for the combat. "I don't want to whip this boy, but the other two sha'n't get one iota of mercy."

He planted himself firmly, as he finished, and the next minute Red Jack Rabbit opened the "mill." But the blow which he dealt was adroitly turned aside, and Jack's hands seized his arms. But they slid off in a second, for they had been lately greased, and the scarlet pugilist gave the white boy a smart, half-playful blow, which added to his discomfiture.

"Oh, if that's your game, I'll play it too, my Red Jack Rabbit!" and the captive rushed upon the little Snake, and, between a push and a blow, sent him sprawling on the ground several yards away.

Cries of derision greeted Red Jack Rabbit's unlucky fall, and War-Bow applauded Dandy Jack by clapping his hands.

The Indian boy having struck partially on his

head, was slowly recovering, when, with shouts of revenge, Little Fox-Tail and Kingfisher sprung forward.

War-Bow called them back, but in vain; they were mad; their blood was up, and nothing but the avenging of their brother's disgrace would satisfy.

"Let them go! let them fight!" were the cries that resounded on every side, and Jack braced himself for the attack.

They reached him before Red Jack Rabbit could regain his feet, and without hesitation threw themselves upon him.

"This is one at a time with a vengeance!" grated Dandy Jack. "But you're the very young roosters I want to whip, for you haven't got a good corner in your eyes, like the Rabbit has."

The first fair blow which the white boy delivered sent Kingfisher staggering back, but he quickly recovered, and was at it again as Little Fox-Tail dextrously tripped their antagonist; and the three rolled upon the ground in a tussle which grew exciting.

Jack soon found that his gripes on the Indians' arms and bodies were unavailing, because of the bear grease, and he desisted in that direction. For a minute he was underneath, struggling manfully and receiving the covert blows which the young pugilists dealt with delight. They did not look like human beings; but resembled dogs in a rough and tumble combat.

The Indians were immensely amused; the circle contracted and the fight was watched with interest.

Jack's hand at last fell upon a scalp-lock. It, too, was greased, but winding his fingers through it he held it firmly and jerked it madly and with all his might.

At that moment he heard a cry of pain, and a pair of hands left his throat. He was holding Little Fox-Tail's scalp-lock, and as the boy tried to wrench it loose, the Indian's face was exposed. And in a manner which enabled Jack to deal a stunning blow. The Indian boy's head fell back, and at that moment Dandy Jack released the tuft of hair.

Then he whirled and getting uppermost turned his attention to Kingfisher.

The Indian could not resist the maddened white boy, and in less than a minute later Jack sprung to his feet with a cry of triumph which he could not keep back.

Red Jack Rabbit was not to be seen; after his discomfiture he had shrunk unnoticed from the scene to show his face but once again.

Dandy Jack stood like a lion in the arena, a stunned foe on each side, and as a yell of revenge went up from a hundred savage hearts, he shook his fist in the faces of his foes.

"Bring on your young game-cocks!" he shouted. "Fling them at me one—two—three at a time, just as you like, and I'll polish them off in a flash. If you haven't any more boys, send in one of your sneaking chiefs. I'm not afraid of your whole tribe!"

Dandy Jack's blood was up.

"I might as well dare the whole crowd, for they're going to kill me, anyhow!" he added under his breath.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRM OF "SUN-DANCE AND BUTLER."

LEAVING Dandy Jack in the Snake village, we will now return to the character whom we left flying from a band of mounted savages—Long Lige Butler.

The surprisal of the Indian by means of the Sage Cock call had resulted in no good; Butler, as we have seen, was compelled to slay the savage, and to fly for his life.

Fortunately the night was about him; if it had been day his capture would have been but a question of time, and one soon settled at that; but the dim light enabled Lige to elude his foes. He stopped at last and muffled his palfrey's feet with a portion of the blanket under the saddle, and when day dawned he looked from the edge of a clump of cottonwood trees that grew along the Fayette upon an endless and dreary plain.

Not the sign of a foe was in sight, and a smile of grim satisfaction crossed the long guide's face as he looked over the waste.

"Well, we sarcumented the dogs!" he said stroking the bristly mane of his animal. "Thar's one Injun what'll never hear another Sage Cock, an' thar's a hull lot of 'em what didn't get the man they wanted last night."

Without more ado, the guide led the mule to the river and watched him drink with eagerness. As for himself he drew the remains of a grouse or some other palatable fowl from the saddle-bags and fell to at once, with keen relish.

"Still thar!" he exclaimed, seeing the tin box

deep in one of the leathern pockets, as he hunted for the cooked bird. "To think that I rode my best last night with a can of niter glisserene joltin' under me! Wal, some men are mighty reckless, an' this proves that Lige Butler is one o' them. Niter glisserene! I guess I won't starve to death as long as I hev got this box along!"

Like all men of his calling, the guide was at home on the plains. The country west of the Rocky Mountains was as an open book to him; he had crossed the plains again and again, and the many trails that crossed them and cut them up were, with but few exceptions, familiar to him.

Well did he acknowledge the truth of Oregon Leon's assertion that the country of the hostile Snakes, was a land of death; but that did not deter him from undertaking the rescue of Dandy Jack and Estil. The thought of leaving them to their fate had never entered his mind. He was still the "maddest man in Oregon."

Several days and nights had intervened between the consummation of plotted rascality on the Oregon trail, and Butler's last adventure with the Indians. He was now not far from the village of the hostiles, as he well knew from the situation of the country, and the course of the river.

He believed that both Jack and Estil were there, and his fervent wish was that he would encounter Luke Whittles. Long Lige had something terrible in store for the thief.

Seated astride of the mule at the edge of the cottonwoods, the long guide saw the sunlight creep over the plain. His eye noticed everything; the waving of the river grass by the morning wind did not escape him.

It was in the midst of his scouting that a creeping object crossed his line of vision. It did not glide along the edge of the distant horizon to suggest a herd of buffaloes or a band of roving Indians; but on the contrary crept slowly and painfully toward the river.

Long Lige saw that the object had the movements of a man, and the dark figure, now and then observable, told him that the creeper was an Indian. The guide hated everything red; the savage of the plains was to him the symbol of treachery and meanness.

An Injun's crawled upon the landscape!" murmured the guide. "It's kind o' queer to see only one hyar, an' without a horse at that. Suthin's wrong with the red-skin; he crawls like a person what had a bullet in his back. Goin' down to the river fur a drink, p'raps. Wal, I'll go down thar, too!"

Butler now dismounted, and at his command, the mule fell over on his side and lay still.

Unarmed save with a revolver, Lige began to approach the Indian, still crawling painfully toward the river, and at last he saw him reach the water's edge.

A cry of delight fell from the red-skin's throat as he thrust his face forward, and he began to fill himself with the not very wholesome beverage.

"Lord! it does him good to drink!" ejaculated Long Lige, looking on with pleasure. "He acts as if he hedn't tasted water fur a week. He's been drinkin' fur five minutes, an' he'll not stop till the river's dry if I don't stop 'im."

The guide now moved cautiously upon the savage again, and at last reached his very side unperceived.

"I say, Injun!"

With a startling cry the drinker sprung back and fastened his blood-shot eyes upon the old guide.

"Thunder an' lightnin'! what's the matter?" continued Butler, as much startled by the Indian's appearance as the red had been by his. "You hev'n't got a piece of whole skin on you! whar hev you been?"

For a moment the Indian made no reply. He was a pitiable looking object, bleeding from head to foot and the blood mixed with dust and parts of grass blades, rendered him absolutely hideous.

"Whar hev you been?" the guide repeated. "One thing's sartin; yer beauty's spiled forever!"

"Sun-Dance has been dragged behind a horse!"

"Sun-Dance—thet devil what keeps the Snakes in hot water all the time? First time I ever met you. Wal, I should suggest that you hev been dragged. At the end of a lasso, too, for thar's the marks of one on yer wrist. Who did this?"

"The white thief!" said Sun-Dance, shutting his teeth hard.

"That's what I call Luke Whittles," said Butler. "But no more talkin' till I fix you up.

You wouldn't be presentable to the ladies jist now, for you look too much like a b'iled owl. I picked up a few traps at the wagon, among 'em a bottle of arnica, which we've got to weaken for you."

At the mention of the wagon the Tlamath opened his eyes.

"Wagon!" he said. "White boy and Sun-Dance drop some Snakes there."

The guide did not reply, but rolled up his sleeves and began to wash the Indian, who shut his teeth hard, and while he bore the pain with admirable stoicism, his eyes looked thankfully upon Butler.

"The white thief rode like the wind," he said. "Sun-Dance try long time to cut the lasso with his knife, and at last it cut cord."

Long Lige did not speak until the blood and earth had been carefully washed from the Indian's body by the waters of the Fayette. He then discovered that the wounds were not serious, consisting in the main of abrasions and bruises, which the arnica would soon heal.

The most serious hurt was on the wrist encircled by the lasso during the Tlamath's forced journey over the plains. It was terribly swollen and very painful, but the guide assured the Indian that it was not broken.

"Now tell me everything!" he said to Sun-Dance after his hurts had been attended to.

The Indian then proceeded and recounted his adventures from the capture of Dandy Jack at the wagon to his own late mishap. Long Lige listened without interrupting him once.

"The young 'un's been caught—that's purty sartin," the guide said at the conclusion of the thrilling narrative. "An' the gal—she's with Luke Whittles, the honery skunk, if some Injuns hev'n't robbed him of her. He won't kill the gal—he's not that kind, so we kin let that go for a while. The boy is the closest an' he's in danger; Oregon Leon's in the Injun village, an' he wouldn't hesitate to put an end to him. The boy first, Sun-Dance. How do you vote on the question?"

The Indian's eye flashed.

"Of course Sun-Dance hates the man who dragged him!" said the Tlamath.

"That's nat'ral!" replied Lige. "But jest now you're in no condition to hunt anybody. Why, you can't stand 'thout help."

"Can't, white man?" flashed the savage in derision, and without assistance he sprung to his feet and looked triumphantly down upon the astonished guide. "Vengeance makes Sun-Dance well! He is ready to go with the white guide. If he says 'to the boy first,' to the boy they go. Jack is brave, an' him an' Sun-Dance are brothers. If he says for Sun-Dance to go an' hunt the girl alone an' pay the stealer back for draggin' him, he go right off. The Tlamath does not feel the pain now. See! he could twist his big wrist, an' never make a cry."

And to illustrate his meaning, the savage suddenly seized his swollen wrist and gave it a wrench that made Long Lige dart forward a cry of horror on his lips.

"You're a devil, Injun!" the guide cried. "Don't do that ag'in; it makes my flesh creep!"

Sun-Dance laughed demoniacally.

"The boy first!" continued Butler. "We've got the hull Snake nation to fight, an' two of the biggest white rascals thet ever lived—Leon Martevelde an' Luke Whittles. We're pardners, Sun-Dance. Give me yer hand."

The two grasped hands.

"To stick together till we've got the young 'uns back, an' played the deuce with the natives!" said Lige, looking into the Tlamath's sparkling eyes. "Never to desert one another."

"Never, white man!"

"That's business, Injun! You're the only red-skin what Lige Butler ever took up with. Now for the long trail. Meanness for meanness—that's the motto!"

CHAPTER XII.

LUKE WHITTLES LOSES A PRISONER.

WE have seen a specimen of Dandy Jack's pluck displayed in the presence of the greater part of the Snake tribe. His battle with the Indian boys has won for him the admiration of the reader. After that, believing that the torture would follow, he faced the principal chiefs and dared them to confront him in the frelit arena. His epithets hurled at the Indians stung them to the quick, and it is highly probable that several would have taken up the glove, if an incident, unexpected, and, to the savages, startling, had not occurred.

A report came from the corral that the horses had stampeded, and the thunder of a thousand

hoofs instantly confirmed the startling intelligence.

Rage and terror took possession of the assembly. War-Bow remanded Jack to the care of a chief who seized him rudely and carried him away on horseback. With wild cries, the witnesses to the pugilistic encounter hastened to the corral, as if the sound of hoofs, rapidly growing indistinct, was not evidence enough of the stampede.

War-Bow was the first to reach the "corral," if the cottonwood limbs that served as a fence could boast of the title. He found the inclosure broken, and the limbs scattered. The guard had a strange story to tell.

He said that a singular steed had suddenly made his appearance. This animal at once commenced to gallop around the inclosure, with head and tail erect, and making a series of whinnies, which the confused guard could not describe. A piece of rope, like a lasso, encircled the animal's neck. A frenzy seemed to take possession of the occupants of the corral; they followed the strange horse round and round, and at last, as he darted off toward the river, they rushed against the barricade, tore it down and thundered away after the stampeder.

This was substantially the story of the stampede as told by its only human spectator.

War-Bow listened to it with impatience, and with a half-contemptuous curling of his lip. He asked the guard why he did not try to shoot the strange steed, and when that worthy protested that he thought the horse might be a being from the unseen land, he received the chief's tomahawk full in his forehead.

The guard sunk quivering to the earth, and a half-suppressed cry of horror fell from the lips of the spectators.

"It was the horse of Sun-Dance!" said War-Bow. "His master has taught him to stampede our horses. Come! we must catch him."

The only available steeds left to the Snakes were those lately ridden into the village by War-Bow and his band, some thirty horses in all.

But no time was to be lost; the thunder of the mad hoofs could be heard no more, and without adieu the Snake chieftain and his followers started in pursuit.

Several hours had passed since Luke Whittles' flight from the village with Estil in his arms.

The reader has not forgotten the circumstances attending the flight; how Sun-Dance lassoed him as he was mounting his horse to be dragged away at a rapid speed behind the horse's heels. Luke's arms were fastened to his side by the rope; but he managed to keep a firm gripe on the stout reins; this alone kept him from being pulled with his captive from the horse.

He had a knife and pistols in his belt, but could use neither. The arms of the girl were comparatively free, but she was quite unconscious, and he had to wait until she recovered.

On, still on!

Now and then Luke glanced over his shoulder, to see the body of his foe still bounding on behind him.

"I'm doin' the Snakes a sarvice by killin' Sun-Dance in this manner—that's what I hate!" he said, the first words he had uttered for miles.

He hardly ever took his eyes from the face of the girl, now white in the moonlight. The lasso passing around her body made her doubly his prisoner. Would she never wake, as she could cut the lasso and free them both?

It was with an ejaculation of joy that he at last saw Estil's eyes open.

"Thank heaven!" he cried. "Here, girl, take my knife and cut this infernal lasso!"

Estil seemed to understand him at once, but she hesitated as her fingers touched the hilt of the knife.

"You are carrying me off for your own purpose!" she said, accusingly. "You will not restore me to my friends."

"Pish!" sneered Luke, but beginning to believe that he was not going to find a helpmate in the girl. "That's woman's talk all over; but this isn't the time for it. Let the rope be then, an' I'll carry a corpse in my arms afore long."

Estil felt the cutting of the cord, it seemed to contract while he spoke, and she drew the knife.

"God make my work for the best!" she inwardly said, as she thrust the blade between Luke's arm and the cord, and cut outward.

The stout lariat resisted her efforts for several moments; but, encouraged by the teamster, she persisted, until the last strand parted and they were free. Sun-Dance had been left behind!

Awile after the severing of the lazo Luke rode at a more moderate gait. He wanted to

rest his steed, for he believed that he was not followed.

In this the thief of the plains was mistaken.

"Whither are we going?" Estil asked, looking up into his face.

"I'll be hanged if I know! We're gettin' away from the Injuns just now," he said.

"Then you are not going back to the Oregon trail?" the girl said, disappointedly.

"Praps not!" was the provoking rejoinder. "You see, gal, the atmosphere back thar might not be the healthiest kind for Luke Whittles. To come squar' out, I guess you needn't fret much about yer situation. I'm goin' whar I please, an' do the same, now that I've got you!"

Estil's cheeks, pale before, seemed to grow white.

"You're uncommon purty!" he continued, fastening his eyes upon the little maid. "Thar's a pile o' money in you in the minin' camps, an' thar, too, I'd be safer than hyar. What d'ye say, my beauty?"

The girl did not reply, but turned her head away.

"Worth a thousand at the camps!" she heard the villain mutter. "An' I'll take her to 'em er die—that's all!"

The break of day found the traitor and his captive still on the plains. The horse was proceeding at a light gallop in a south-easterly direction, or toward the head-waters of the Big Wood branch of the Oregon.

"Thar's a queer sound behind us!" said Luke all at once. "I've heard it fur some time an' now it's gettin' louder. Whoa! Lightnin'! we'll investigate afore we proceed further."

The horse was quite willing to stop, and Luke rising erect looked back in the direction of the Snake village now miles and miles away.

For several moments he saw nothing, but heard the ominous sound which had annoyed him for some time.

"It sounds like a herd of wild hosses!" he said. "By Jove! if it's a stampede, I want 'em to keep clear of us."

At length the teamster discerned a dark line along the rim of the horizon.

"It's a stampede, sartin!" he ejaculated after some minutes' observation, and the next moment he fell astride of the horse again.

Estil saw by his countenance that he considered the moment one of great peril, and the manner in which he dug the heavy spurs into the rowels of the horse, confirmed her observation.

"Mebbe they'll miss us!" he said in response to Estil's look. "But I was born under an unlucky star, an' they're likely to run me down. Cuss the fiend what stampeded them!"

He did not have to stand up to see the oncoming herd now. The thunder of their hoofs seemed to shake the earth; their many heads were erect, and their flying manes distinctly seen.

"Just as I expected!" Luke Whittles said at last gritting his teeth like a villain driven to the wall by his trackers. "What's the use of a horse carryin' double an' nearly fagged out besides tryin' to outrun a herd of fresh horses what hev'n't a bit atween their teeth? Thar's no use in that, an' thar's only one thing what kin be done. I see'd Long Lige do it once upon the Yellow Medicine. It's the ferlorn hup, gal!"

Estil did not inquire into the meaning of his words, for he turned his steed straight toward the wild herd and drew his pistols.

"A carbine would be better for the ball is bigger," he said; "but we've got to put up with the pistols. Stan' still, Lightnin'! You're an Injun boss an' know jest what I'm goin' to do. Lie close before me, gal, an' don't bother my arm. If I kin pick the leaders, why, the herd 'll divide an' go around us."

Estil cast a look at the herd before she ducked her head behind the horse's neck. The sight which she saw was magnificent; the horses were rushing straight upon them, led by a noble specimen of the race.

Luke Whittles's eyes beamed with an unnatural fire as he waited the onset. His white lips seemed glued together, and the great revolvers appeared a part of his hands. He never took his eyes from the leaders of the gang, two strong limbed piebalds, majestic and beautiful.

He waited till they came within pistol-shot, and all at once his pistols were thrust forward. "Thar! an' thar!" he exclaimed as he touched the different triggers.

One of the piebald steeds staggered back, and fell; the other jerked his head to one side, and with a strange cry kept on.

A cloud of dust rolled up from the roots of the grass, and with an oath Luke flung the pis-

tols down. Then he seized the lines; but two late!

The herd was upon him!

Lightning, the horse, realized his own danger, and tried to turn and run with the herd, but in vain!

The thunderbolts struck him, and bore him back upon his haunches. The collision was terrible.

The cry of a young girl was heard, only for a moment; the wild neighing and the thunder of the hoofs stifled it.

A moment later the herd had passed beyond the spot.

Where the brief battle had been fought, lay a horse and a man.

"Just as I expected!" grated Whittles, raising himself with difficulty and taking a survey of his surroundings. "Lightnin' dead, killed by his own kind, an' I'm in a bad fix myself. But the gal—what I war takin' to the mines! What's become o' her? That's the question!"

Luke looked at the cloud of dust that marked the course of the wild horses, and gritted his teeth for very rage.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FRYING-PAN AND THE FIRE.

THE chief who bore Dandy Jack from the arena at the command of War-Bow put him down in front of the very lodge from which Estil had lately been borne by Luke the traitor.

The Indian was not gentle in his handling of the boy, and Jack drew a breath of relief when he saw that he was about to quit the scarlet talons. Dragging the doomed youth to the wigwam, the Snake hurriedly bound him and thrust him into the structure with a guttural ejaculation of mingled hatred and contempt.

"No bear guard white boy for pale thief to kill," said the Indian after Jack had fallen headlong upon the couch.

"That's a jolly thing!" answered the boy. "When a fellow's bound, a bear guard is not the most desirable. I'm going to take things just as they come, and just now they're coming fast and furious. Wonder where they all are now—Lige, Sun-Dance, Luke Whittles, Estil—all of them?"

The darkness that enveloped him, for the curtain had fallen back into its place, seemed palpable; but he felt that the Indian was listening, for he did not hear him depart.

"Mighty uncomfortable position this," he murmured to himself. "But didn't I give it to Little Fox-tail and Kingfisher? I fancy that one scalp-lock is loose at the roots, and that two eyes are nearly shut. Red Jack Rabbit—I hope I didn't hurt him, for he had such pretty eyes—they were mild and harmless. If he hurt himself when he fell, I hope it is nothing serious. We could be friends without much trouble; he's got a big heart, Red Jack Rabbit has, and an Indian name that suits him to a 't.'"

Dandy Jack did not attempt to escape, but assumed the most comfortable position attainable, resolving to wait till dawn if undisturbed that long. As the moments waned the sounds of tumult in the Indian town began to decrease, and presently it was comparatively quiet. Now and then the wolfish howl of a dog fell mournfully upon the heart of the boy captive, and he would try to shut his ears to the dismal echoes that came back from the cottonwoods along the river.

"The longer I wait the stiller the night gets," Dandy Jack said, speaking for the first time in several hours. "If there's a guard at the door he hasn't moved for a long time. I believe he's sneaked off and left me alone."

Intent upon discovering whether the guard had actually decamped, Jack began to roll toward the door, the position of which he knew by the pleasant wind that came between the curtains.

His movements were cautious and successful, and he at last reached the goal. Parting the curtains with his foot he looked out. The stars were shining with unwonted brilliancy; but Jack could not discover the statue figure of the guard.

"Wonder if a fellow couldn't roll through the village to the river. It's a long ways; but what won't a person do for liberty? I can find the stream; the wind will tell me where it is, and—by gosh! I'm going to try the roll, if it kills me!"

Dandy Jack had an active brain. He formed plans and executed them rapidly, not stopping to count all the dangers attendant upon many of them.

To roll through a hostile Indian village swarming with keen-scented dogs and keener humans

was no child's play. There are few old frontiersmen who would undertake the journey; they would regard such a proposition as the height of folly.

Safety seemed to beckon to Dandy Jack from the river bank; he saw her figure, and not the death-environed thoroughfare through the village. His guard from some, to him, unaccountable reason, had left his post. Why hesitate longer?

When the boy uttered the determination to reach the river, a good mile away, or die in the attempt, he meant just what he said.

Thrusting his head beyond the curtains of the wigwam he listened with almost throbless heart. If he had known at that moment that Long Lige Butler was not far away, he might have altered his intention and awaited events.

"Here goes, win or lose!" ejaculated the little hero, pushing his body into the night. "I hope Heaven will watch over Dandy Jack, and guide him to the river."

The roll—for a crawl the movement certainly was not—commenced under propitious circumstances. It was the darkest hour of the night, and not far remote from dawn. The restless Indians even seemed to sleep; the turmoil of the hours just passed forgotten, and fortune, or heaven, appeared to keep the curious dogs more to be dreaded by Dandy Jack than the Indians, aloof.

The boy rolled cautiously toward the stream, bruising his hands bound upon his back, and selecting his route as well as his sight would permit in the night.

"Thunder! a dog!" grated the boy as the baying of a hound suddenly filled his ears like the tramp of doom. "I'm half-way to the river, I know, and getting along finely. Oh, Father above, keep the dogs away from Dandy Jack!"

The response to the boy's fervent prayer was the deep baying, louder and nearer than before.

Jack stopped to ascertain the location of the brute, and soon found that it was approaching from the river.

Between him and the goal of safety! No pleasant thought.

"Out of the frying-pan into the fire!" the boy murmured with grim humor revealed in his eyes alone. "Gods! what unearthly howls! The animal must be mad or dying."

On, came the dog as yet unseen; but a real terror, as well he might be, to Dandy Jack. All at once the boy stopped rolling, and the attitude which he assumed near a lodge told that he intended to wait for the animal and trust to luck.

Moments now seemed hours to the boy. They were precious, for each flitting by brought daylight and consequently discovery nearer. Jack kept his face to the wind, his eyes on the look-out for the dismal dog.

At last something took shape before him in the dim starlight. That it was the canine, a mournful howl attested.

Jack held his breath. Perhaps the animal would pass him by, and allow him to pursue his precious journey unmolested.

The boy was actually taking heart when the fire-balls—the dog's eyes—became stationary, not twenty feet away. They appeared to be fixed intently upon him, and Jack, as he looked gritted his teeth in impotent rage.

"Mebbe the brute will take a notion to move on d'rectly," murmured Jack; but the beginning of another hour found the fiery orbs still there.

"I can have the dog upon me in a minute by pushing forward. If I had a knife forward, I'd go; but tied hand and foot I'm helpless! helpless!"

Some unpropitious fate had sent the canine to interrupt Dandy Jack's flight to freedom; but he did not despair.

The howls of the animal had ceased; his whole attention seemed to be centered upon the bound fugitive.

Another hour and Jack saw the sky getting light; the stars seemed to fade away, and a fresher, cooler breeze fanned his face.

It was getting daylight.

One by one the golden orbs of the sky melted away, as it were, and the forms of the nearest lodges began to appear. The dog still retained its position, as if determined to doom the boy.

"I'd be better off if I was back in the prison lodge!" Dandy Jack murmured. "Fishes and eels! what was that?"

The boy's exclamation was caused by a singular noise apparently overhead. He looked up and saw a red face regarding him from the door of the wigwam against which he lay.

Dandy Jack could not fly; all that he could do he did, and that was to gaze, to stare into the scarlet countenance.

"White fighter!" ejaculated the red lips of the

apparition, while Dandy Jack continued to stare. "Great Spirit guide him here!"

There was glee in the tone, but whether fiendish or not the boy could not determine before the figure sprang like a catamount upon him.

In the twinkling of an eye Dandy Jack was lifted from the ground and flung headlong into the new tent—a prisoner once more.

His captor sprang hastily in after him.

"What white fighter stop for?" was the demand.

"The rascally dog got into my path."

A queer laugh followed Jack's answer, and he was dragged to the opening.

"White fighter afraid of dead dog? See!" said the Indian, parting the curtains and pointing out.

Jack looked and bit his lips in chagrin.

There was a feathered shaft in the animal's side, and he had evidently been dead some time.

"Dead dog keep boy from goin' on!" the Indian said. Him come to stay here till Red Jack Rabbit say go!"

Dandy Jack started at the mention of the name, and then for the first time saw that he had rolled into the hands of Red Jack Rabbit, the Indian youth whom he had lately overcome in the arena.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DEED OF A DEMON.

"THAT'S the knife, Snakefoot! Where did you get it?"

As Oregon Leon spoke he put forth a hand, and took the weapon which the Indian who had just entered his tent extended.

"Find it in lodge where white girl was?"

"Aha! It's the knife which some Indian gave her and I hunted for him last night. You look as if you recognize the blade, Snakefoot. Tell me if you do. She said I did not dare to touch the owner. If they stood before me now, I'd show her that I dared."

"Knife b'long to Indian boy—Red Jack Rabbit!" the red-skin said.

"That boy!" said Leon, sneeringly. "That boy her friend! Oh! I suppose the copper-colored urchin was smitten and thought to get her away. May be he had a hand in with Luke the—"

"No! Red Jack Rabbit somewhere 'bout yit," interrupted the Indian. "Him fight white boy last night, an' git licked. White chick not found yit."

"The boy beats the deuce!" said Marteveld. "Last night he was flung bound into a wigwam; this morning the place was empty, no sign of cut cords anywhere, no trail! I'd believe in ghosts, Snakefoot, if I hadn't too much sense. Are they hunting for him yet?"

"Injuns give up hunt. Bad spirits carry white boy off."

"Pish! old ghost-eater!" sneered the bandit. "If I wanted to surprise the village, I'd go out and lay my hands on the young rascal; but it isn't my time. War-Bow and his horse-hunters not in yet?"

Snakefoot shook his head.

"The horse that stampeded the corral is an old hand at the business. Why, you know, Snakefoot, that we can train horses to stampede a corral and we needn't go near. Catch those animals? War-Bow will have to follow them to sundown if he expects to perform that feat. But are you ready for the business?"

"Snakefoot would like time to study over it."

"Thunder and guns!" vociferated Leon. "You'd study till your head was gray. I'm half Indian! I know your race as well as you do, and I never heard of one taking a proposition into consideration before. Study? not one minute for that!"

As Marteveld uttered the last word, he snatched up a revolver which lay on the rough stand with which the apartment was provided and cocked it quickly.

The Indian started back at the action with an ejaculation of wrath.

"This is a desperate scheme which admits of no study—especially by you!" continued the bandit, looking the savage in the eye. "Now make up your mind very quick, or I'll drive a bullet through your brain."

The devil-light of madness danced in Marteveld's eyes.

"Snakefoot will do it."

"No shenanigan!" the bandit said. "I don't fancy the light in your eye. Trust an Indian only in sight; that's what the soldiers say, and I guess they've hit the nail on the head. You'll do it, eh, Snakefoot?"

"Yes."

"Swear it?"

"Yes!"

"Well, we'll try you. By the bones of your mother! by the Manitou's lodge and your place in Spirit land you will obey me?"

"Snakefoot swears."

"Now!" continued Marteveld, "to-night the time. War-Bow has insulted me, the dirty Indian dog. He will soon plot against me; but he shall never lift his voice against Oregon Leon, the very man who put him at the head of six hundred warriors in this village. Snakefoot, go and prepare the two horses, yours and mine; they were not in the big corral last night, thank fortune. When you are ready come back. I'll fix the other things!"

The Indian listened to the bandit, and then withdrew.

"A white man's getting down when he leagues with an Indian to carry out his own plans," Marteveld said with a grin. "Didn't I say last night that War-Bow would soon see his biggest pile of ashes? Talk about gratitude! Why it isn't in an Indian, and I know them better than the next man. He was a miserable trap-plunderer up on Yellow Medicine when I first met him. I brought him down here and by degrees lifted him in the estimation of the Snakes. Up and up he went, till I suddenly made him chief. It took lying, secret blood-letting, and all that, but I made him chief of this branch of the Snake nation—I, Leon Marteveld. Now he pays me back. Don't I know, War-Bow, that you are plotting against me? and do you dream that I'm going to fold my arms and take your stab quietly? No! I'm going to leave your village—and it's going to leave you at the same time. I can divide the tribe at any time, but perhaps I'll not try that. Once out of this place, I'll hunt two persons down. I intend to kill one and the other—ha! Estil, you shall yet be Leon Marteveld's!"

He brought his clenched hand down heavily on the table.

He looked like the most ferocious pictures of the wounded bandit. A bloody bandage over his forehead told that he had not recovered from the blow which Luke Whittles dealt with the heavy whip. His cheeks wore a hue that was not nature's; his eyes, bloodshot and mad, gave him the look of a tiger.

The ex-agent's supremacy over the red Arabs of the plains was drawing to a close. The very person whom, by chicanery well planned and carried out, he had elevated to sachemship was plotting against him, for War-Bow dreaded the white man for his subtlety.

After Snakefoot's departure, Oregon Leon began to prepare two torches. He worked away in the light of the candle which burned on the stand, and at last finished his task.

"They'll go like a flash!" he said, eyeing his work with a look of fiendish glee. "There hasn't been a drop of rain on the lodges for four months, and the wind blows from the north. Good luck all around. I had a little bad last night. It came in the shape of Luke Whittles."

He shut his teeth hard behind the traitor's name.

"Every dog has his day, Luke, and on your last one, I'm going to skin you alive!"

At this moment the door opened and Snakefoot reappeared to the bandit.

"All ready?"

"Ready!"

"The horses—"

"At the old cottonwood."

"That's business! Here, take the torch. You've got matches in your pouch. Now let's get to work."

One of the prepared flambeaux was thrust into the Indian's hand; he took it reluctantly.

Marteveld picked up a revolver and thrust it into his belt.

"I came into this country with nothing and I'll take this with me," he said, with a triumphant glance at the Snake. "What do you want to say? There's a word on the end of your tongue, so spit it out."

"Snakefoot knows where the white boy's been hidin' all day," said the Indian.

"Pshaw! is that all?" said Marteveld. "I knew that. Well, we'll rout him out before many minutes, and he'll get his hair singed, p'raps. Come on!"

Oregon Leon snuffed the candle out with his fingers, and motioned Snakefoot from the lodge.

The next moment they stood in the dim starlight, the only sound the chirping of a cricket near by.

Like ghosts the two figures glided through the village making a path to the north. A good strong wind was blowing from that direction.

After a crawl and walk of some minutes they found two horses tethered by Indian bridles to

a cottonwood at the edge of the village. Stretching east and west from this spot was a dark object which seemed to be a breastwork; but which in reality was a heap of parched grass, prepared for a diabolical purpose.

"Bless the wind!" said Oregon Leon, fiendishly, not fervently. "And you've done your work well, as far as I can see, Snakefoot. Now for the big light!"

He stooped before the work of grass and struck a match on his legging. He applied the blaze to the torch and saw it flash.

Snakefoot did the same.

"You run right, I run left! Meet me here," Marteveld said to the Indian, and then they separated, each running in the direction indicated with the torch in the grass.

The ignition was instantaneous; the wind blew the dancing flames forward, as if eager to carry out that part of the protean programme allotted to it by the bandit.

With a hiss and a roar the fire leaped against the nearest lodges and quickly ignited them. Nothing could check it now; the entire hostile village was doomed.

Wild cries soon began to attest the inhabitants' discovery of the disaster.

"Let 'em howl!" Marteveld said, turning to Snakefoot, who was contemplating the scene with no evident relish. "To-morrow, or whenever he comes back, little heaps of ashes will greet War-Bow. This is my revenge! He finds no fool in Leon Marteveld."

For several moments longer the couple contemplated the fire which now had the Snake village fairly in its grasp. It was a thrilling sight, and from the heart of the conflagration as it were came the mad cries of the savages.

"Now, let us go. Nothing on earth can put it out. This is my good-by to War-Bow!"

Without more adieu Oregon Leon vaulted into the saddle followed by the Indian.

"Your tomahawk, just one minute!" said the ex-agent, turning to his tool, and the next instant, he unresisted drew the weapon from the belt.

"I guess I'll go alone. I don't like your eye!" he suddenly said.

The iron weapon flew upward and Snakefoot realizing his danger threw up an arm to arrest the blow; but too late!

Down came the hatchet, and the Indian fell from his horse—dead!

"It is best to go alone!" Marteveld said leaving the weapon in the brain of his victim.

"Snakefoot wasn't trustful—like all Indians." Then he wheeled his steed, and darted to the north.

"Followed by the Indian's horse!" he said after a minute's rapid gallop. "And I don't want to be bothered by anything just now."

He drew rein and waited for the steed to come up.

In a moment the animal came in sight, and as it stopped suddenly beside him the bandit of the plains started back to see a revolver thrust into his very face.

"Said I war afear'd to come into the Snake kentry, eh?" said a rough voice behind the pistol. "I'm hyar, Oregon Leon, an' I'm still the maddest man in Oregon."

"Lige Butler!" gasped the bandit.

"Long Lige Butler at your service, an' don't forget that I'm pokin' a pistol inter your face. It's a pistol what goes off uncommon easy, too."

The brigand's face was ghastly.

CHAPTER XV.

INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH.

"FIRE! fire! Injun town all burnin' up!"

These words uttered in accents of terror roused Dandy Jack from the slumber which he was enjoying in Red Jack Rabbit's lodge.

Since his capture by the Indian boy, his antagonist of the ring, an event which we have already witnessed, he had not stirred beyond the precincts of the wigwam.

His escape from the prison lodge was discovered shortly after his singular flight from it, and a vigorous search was at once instituted. Lying in Red Jack Rabbit's wigwam the boy hero heard his hunters pass and repass, the Indian youth with well feigned zeal joining in the hunt himself.

But the beaters of the bush did not disclose the quarry, and at nightfall Red Jack Rabbit returned with pleased countenance. He was secreting Dandy Jack for some purpose which he did not venture to reveal, and the boy himself could not devise what it could be.

It was a long day for Dandy Jack; the hours dragged their slow lengths along while he lay in the Indian lodge half covered with dirty buffalo-skins, sweating, hungry, and as the

reader may readily imagine, in no good humor.

But when the words that open the present chapter fell upon his ears he sprang to his feet to see Red Jack Rabbit plainly revealed by the lurid light of the flames. The Indian boy was holding back the curtains of the lodge with his right hand.

Jack started from the sight with an involuntary exclamation of amazement.

The whole world without seemed to be on fire, and wild cries were mingled with the roar and hiss of the flames.

"Some one set town on fire!" the Rabbit said, answering the question of the white boy's startled stare. "Wind come from north, drive fire right before it. Town all bound to burn!"

"Then let us get out of it!" cried the captive. "You're not going to stay here and get burned to a crisp?"

A curious smile played with the young Indian's lips.

"Fire hurt red-skin just as much as it hurt white."

"That's so!" confirmed Jack. "And if we stay here much longer we'll feel it, too."

For a moment Red Jack Rabbit continued to gaze into the boy's face, and then his knife cut the thongs which had confined the captive's hands, since his unfortunate roll.

"I s'pose I can go now?" Dandy Jack said looking gratefully into the Rabbit's face.

"Not alone. White boy never git out if Red Jack Rabbit did not show him how."

"Then, come on."

A carbine was thrust into Dandy Jack's hand and a moment later he found himself beyond the precincts of the lodge.

"Loaded?" he asked laconically, tapping the weapon.

"Sixteen!" was the reply. "White boy look!"

He felt himself whirled half-way round as the young Snake spoke. A grand sight met his gaze.

The fire sweeping like a demon before the wind which was now a blast, was swallowing up the lodges. The many structures, dry as tinder, of course, offered no resistance to the flames, and whole lines of them disappeared as if in a flash of gunpowder. The spectacle was awful; the frenzied savages had ceased to fight the devouring element, and were flying to the southernmost part of the village, loaded with the penates which they could not abandon.

The few warriors left behind, for a great many had followed War-Bow after the stampeded horses, were a set of desperate creatures. They flitted like specters through the lurid light, followed by hordes of howling dogs, and pushing lodges to the ground, in the forlorn hope of arresting the fiery demon.

"Look to the right and the left!" Dandy Jack suddenly cried, seizing the arm of Red Jack Rabbit who appeared to be stupefied by the conflagration. "We cannot stay here. The fire is hemming us in! It is closing in upon our flanks. The Indians see this and are flying to the south!"

"Does white boy want to fly with them?"

"Not if there is any other outlet!"

"Does he think there is?"

"There ought to be for me!" Jack answered, half appealingly. "If I had a horse I would ride through that narrow street straight to the north."

"Through the fire?"

"Yes."

"Brave white boy! He shall go through the hot places."

"Where is your horse?"

"Stay there."

With the command Red Jack Rabbit bounded from Dandy Jack's side, and vanished in an instant. The white boy was alone.

He stood for a moment longer in the light of Oregon Leon's great fire exposed to the view of the excited Indians, when he sprang to the shadow of the Rabbit's lodge, as yet undestroyed.

"I rolled myself plump into the fire didn't I?" he said to himself. "Never was a boy in such a pickle before. It's nip and tuck whether I get out or not. What does that mean? Six musket shots and a thousand yells. Maybe Red Jack Rabbit has to fight for his horse!"

The sounds that were borne from the southwestern portion of the burning village to Dandy Jack's ears, told him that something unusual was taking place. He listened with cocked carbine in the shadow believing that the Snake boy's attempt to secure a horse for his flight was being met with force.

The yells grew louder, which told the boy that their makers were coming toward him.

There were no shots now; but fifty dogs were yelping vociferously.

Jack suddenly saw a band of Indians; they had stopped in the light as if they had lost their prey for a moment.

The boy shrunk close to the side of the Rabbit's lodge; but he kept his eye on the savages.

All at once he heard wild yells of delight announce a welcome discovery, and with wild gesticulations toward him, the entire group rushed forward.

"Found out at last!" the boy grated, believing that his presence had been discovered. "Indians before me and a fire behind! It's a ticklish situation; but I'm going to make the best I can out of it."

He stepped almost to the edge of the shadow and consequently toward the Indians, not seeing the dark figure which was rising from the ground behind him.

"Here goes a few shots, you greasy wretches!" exclaimed the boy, and lifting the carbine to his shoulder, he poured several shots into the human pack which brought it to a sudden halt and left three bodies on the ground.

"Stopped you, eh?" Cold lead isn't to be fooled with!" cried the boy.

Nonplussed by the shots from the shadow, the Snakes did not know what to do.

"Come on! There's no run in Dandy Jack!" continued the boy; but the roar of fire and wind drowned his voice.

He felt the heat on his back; the light fell on the astonished Indians; it was also chasing away his protective shadow.

Suddenly a new cry was heard, then the snort and tramp of horses, and a magnificent looking Indian reined in his froth-covered steed among the group.

"War-Bow!" ejaculated the boy, recognizing the sachem. "The light made him ride like the wind; but he can't save the town."

He saw the Indians conversing excitedly with the new arrival; their speech was accompanied with gestures toward the dead and their slayer.

War-Bow suddenly sprang erect upon the back of his horse. Then he tore his mantle of skins from his shoulders and waved it over his head, while loud cries pealed from his throat.

"I'll make this tribe chieftainless!" said Dandy Jack, under his breath.

The carbine, so fatal to the warriors a few minutes before, was raised against the chief; but before he could touch the trigger, a loud report seemed to deafen him, and War-Bow fell forward from his horse.

"Thunder and guns!" exclaimed Dandy Jack, whirling in an instant upon the unseen marksman.

But before he caught sight of the slayer, he heard a familiar voice at his side.

"Here, white boy! Take horse an' ride through fire."

It was Red Jack Rabbit!

The boy and the excited horse which he held seemed to have risen from the very earth. Their sudden appearance startled Jack.

"Quick!" cried the Indian. "War-Bow killed! Snakes rush into fire to pay white boy back."

"But I didn't kill the chief. The shot came from behind me."

Red Jack Rabbit seized Dandy Jack's arm, and pulled him to the horse.

"Get up an' ride down narrow way. Fire soon be here."

"Aren't you going, too? They'll kill you for befriending me."

"No kill!"

"They will!" said Jack. "I'm not in the habit of deserting friends. You've got to go with me, Jack Rabbit, or I don't budge a peg!"

The boy was determined; his manner and words told this; the Indian regarded him curiously.

"Not go, eh?"

"Not without you!"

"Then—"

The sentence was never finished, for a figure leaped suddenly upon the red-skin, tore his hand from the sinew-rein, and dashed him to the ground!

Dandy Jack started back with an exclamation of wonder and surprise. He saw a figure vault lightly upon the horse's back, and before he could distinguish whether it was red or white, it darted forward and jerked him from the ground.

The boy, lifted upon the steed, could not struggle; but he did not relinquish his hold on the carbine.

He felt the animal bound forward and found himself enveloped in a dense cloud of offensive smoke. The person, whoever he was, was riding into the very teeth of the fire!

The heat grew intense but the horse went on probably up the narrow street, flame-fringed, which the boy had already marked.

He shut his eyes and felt himself carried on. When he opened them again he no longer seemed to be on earth—fire was everywhere around him!

The strange being did not sit upright; his body was bent forward and his cheek, rough as a stone, pressed hard against the boy's.

It was a time which Dandy Jack was never to forget.

CHAPTER XVI.

A KICKING MACHINE WANTED.

The appearance of Long Lige was enough to frighten Leon Martvelde.

He fairly gasped when in the light of the stars he saw the old guide before him with a pistol in his hand.

He did not know that the old cottonwood to which Snakefoot had tethered the horses sheltered the long hunter. Sun-Dance was somewhere in the Snake village hunting for Dandy Jack, and after a certain length of time the young savage was to rejoin Butler at the tree, and report the result of his investigations. From his retreat Long Lige had unexpectedly witnessed the coming of Snakefoot and Martvelde, the firing of the village, and the brutal assassination of the former.

When Oregon Leon turned his horse's head to the north the guide resolved to bring him down; he could not harbor the thought of the villain escaping, and so, leaping upon the animal from which the Indian had fallen he thundered after him.

His coming up with Martvelde we have already witnessed.

"Now do you think I'm afraid to come into the Snake kentry?" Butler shot at the white ruffian after a moment's silence.

"You are here, that is certain!" grated Martvelde in no good humor.

"Why, to be sure!" smiled the guide. "Now Oregon, whar's the boy? The gal—she's off with Luke Whittles somewhar, but we'll find her."

"The boy? He's back yonder!" said the renegade pointing to the lurid light that seemed to wrap the horizon in flame. "I left him there in the lodge of the meanest little Indian on earth, Red Jack Rabbit."

"Just so, an' he's likely to git singed?"

"Escape is impossible!"

"It does your soul good to say this, Oregon! I see it in the glitter of your eyes."

"Why should I like the boy?"

"Thar's no partic'lar reason for it I admit. You left him thar—in other words, deserted him. Now what do you think we're goin' to do with you?"

There was no reply. Leon Martvelde was looking into Butler's face without a word.

"The question seems to strike you kinder perceptibly," the guide went on. "I never kill a man like you killed the Injun back yonder, Oregon, that was a mean, cold-blooded murder, jest the kind that a renegade government-agent would commit. While I watched you from the tree, I thought you would take the red-skin away with you; but no; you give him his own hatchet—in his head. 'Dead men tell no tales,' eh, Oregon? How fast is your horse?"

The renegade started at the interrogative.

"He is new to me."

"New to me, too, is this critter," said the guide. "I guess Sun-Dance an' the boy kin take care o' themselves for awhile. I'll give you thirty feet the start. If I catch you, Oregon, thar'll be a final settlement of accounts between us. Are you ready?"

"I am ready!"

"Go for'ard an' start!" Long Lige said. "I always give a man some show, though precious little *you'd* give a feller. No quibblin'; go an' start!"

There was a strange flash in Martvelde's eyes as he turned from the guide to ride his race for life.

"I kin see 'im all the time, I guess," the old guide murmured to himself. "It isn't too dark to allow him to git out o' sight."

His sentence closed abruptly, for a sudden plunge told him that the ex-agent was off like a thunderbolt.

"Now fur the chase!" Butler exclaimed, striking the Indian horse in the flanks, and the next moment the race was "on."

Over the plain, level as a floor, there, pursuer and pursued flew like careering arrows, leaving the burning village far behind them, as they rode northward, on, still on!

"He's got a good horse!" murmured the guide,

after he had ridden several miles without much apparent success. "I'm gittin' too far from Sun-Dance an' the boy to suit me. Can't I gain on the demon?"

At length he discovered that he *was* gaining on the renegade, and presently his steed, missed for awhile, came in sight again, a dark object bounding over the plain.

Long Lige changed his pistol from the right hand to the left.

"I'll catch the rein an' stop his horse," he muttered. "I've given him a chance for life, an' it won't be murder if I catch 'im!"

The distance between the horses now lessened perceptibly.

"He's playin' the Comanche tactics—gettin' under his animile to escape my bullet!" Butler ejaculated, noticing that Marteveld's steed did not seem to carry a rider. "But, Comanche or not, I'll do the general government a service to-night what might entitle Lige Butler to a pension."

All the outrages committed by Oregon Leon rose in the guide's mind as he bore down upon him, with the speed of certain fate. He would rid the Far West of one scoundrel who had cursed it for several years, making the Oregon trail a highway of death and disaster.

The guide's horse was rapidly nearing the ex-agent's beast, which exhibited signs of fatigue: the race was at an end.

At last the steeds were side by side, and as the head of Butler's shot forward, the guide's hand seized the rein.

"Whoa! Oregon!" he shouted, in stentorian tones. "I've got you, my boy. Come! no Comanche game. Git up an' act the man, fur Lige Butler stands no foolshness. Nary time!"

There was no response.

The guide had stopped the ex-agent's horse in the open plains; but not a sign of his rider was visible.

"Git up and show yourself!" repeated Long Lige, hastily. "No foolin', Oregon. Be a man at this time, if you hev been a dog all your life."

Silence still! It perplexed the speaker, and, with an oath on his lips, he wheeled the horse half-way round to discover—what? that Leon Marteveld was not there!

The old guide stared like a madman at the riderless steed. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his eyes.

Leon Marteveld gone? Had he been chasing a riderless horse over the plain?

"Gone he is!" grated Butler, forced to admit that the renegade had outwitted him. "It beats my time all holler! Hyar I've been folleerin' an empty saddle—all for nothin'. Once afore he outwitted me, down on the Oregon trail, an' now for the second time. Dog-gone my foolshness! I hed him in my fingers back yonder; but I got a good spell on me, an' guv 'im a chance for his worthless life. Thar's whar I missed it. Say, pony, if you promise to administer a good kickin' Lige Butler will furnish the subject. I want to be kicked. Wal, thar's no use cryin' over broken jugs. The devil outwitted me, an' he'll be doin' some rascally tricks afore mornin'. I'm mad! madder than I war when Luke Whittles tuck the wagon, an' the young 'uns."

The old guide beat his pistol stock with his clenched hand as was his wont when in a passion, and he looked the picture of chagrin.

"Bless me if I wouldn't head toward the mines an' sell myself for a blasted fool of the children was safe!" he continued. "A fellow doesn't git credit on the great account book for every good act. I thought I war humane when I guv Oregon a chance; but I guess I wasn't. He would hev stuck to the horse if he had any manhood left. No! he wouldn't either. I guess, Leon, you done just what Lige Butler would hev done under the circumstances. I'm goin' back now, the biggest idiot what ever rode an Indian horse in these parts."

He struck Marteveld's steed with his hand and having seen it bound away turned the head of his own beast toward the south.

Far away appeared a line of light—the burning village of the Snakes, and the guide kept his eyes fastened upon it as he rode leisurely along.

The chase had been fruitless. He had not only lost the bandit of the plains; but he was far from Sun-Dance and Dandy Jack who might have fallen victims to fire or the tomahawk in the doomed town.

"I wish thar war a kickin'-machine hyar!" grated Butler, again and again as he rode along. "I'd jest like to git before it, an' let it kick me twenty-five miles!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ENDING OF TWO RIDES.

"HEAVEN help me an' keep me from beneath the feet of these mad horses!"

It was the girl Estil who uttered this short but fervent prayer, as the stampeded horses headed by Little River, the Tlamath's steed, rushed upon her, still in the arms of Whittles the traitor.

The shock was terrible! Luke's horse, as we have seen, was borne backward, himself and horse and the girl—flung, as if by some tremendous arm, into the very midst of the herd.

As she struck, her hands closed upon a flying mane, and she felt herself carried on amid the thunder of hoofs, and the wild concert of neighs.

Estil had no time to think of any thing but self preservation, and that seemed to lie in her strength. If she could cling to the animal which bore her on at such rapid gait she was assured of ultimate deliverance from the doom that threatened her, for the horses could not run forever.

Therefore, she clung to the heavy mane with a terrible tenacity, but soon realizing that she was liable at any moment to be struck by the bounding fore feet of the frightened beast, she resolved to find safety by a seat on the horse's back.

So swinging to and fro with a swaying motion she soon threw her right foot up over the fore shoulder, and in a moment more was upon the mustang's back—a veritable wild rider of a wild steed. Clinging to the long mane and riding with the easy motion of the equestrienne, Estil felt a sense of delight in the dangerous situation. She was at least safe from the horrible danger of being trodden to death, and not without hope that at a propitious moment she could drop from the creature's back and find a safe retreat in some covert of woods or plain.

At length she saw a glittering something. What it was she did not know; but the horses seemed to greet it with whinnies of delight and quickened their lessening speed.

Very soon thereafter Estil knew that she was approaching a river, and the stampeded plunged madly into the water. They drank with inordinate greed while the girl looked on, her lips parched, and her mouth full as it were with the punishing alkali dust of the plains.

It was a long time before the horses quenched their thirst, and then they turned from the river without permitting their fair young prisoner one drop to cool her tongue.

A few cottonwoods on the bank promised to afford shade and rest for the horses, and hailing the grass with eagerness, they began to roll. Then it was that Estil particularly noticed the steed that had borne her through that long ride now happily at an end, though safety still remained unassured.

He was a beautiful iron gray with faultless limbs and a mien which proclaimed him a king among his race. As Estil looked, he threw his head around and fixed his eyes upon her in a human-like look; large eyes they were, and glittering behind their fringe of alkali dust.

The marks of a lasso encircled his arched neck, and a band was visible on his shoulder.

All at once he walked away and selected a grassy spot for his roll.

Estil saw the movement and divining the steed's intention leaped to the ground.

Free at last! but in the midst of scores of Indian horses liable at any moment to become frightened and rush over her in a panic.

She shrunk against a tree at the thought of her great danger while the iron gray began his walk.

"Water! water!" gasped Estil turning to the river, and with the strength of desperation she moved slowly but with eagerness to the coveted goal.

"Thank Heaven for this!" she gasped as she fell forward at last, her lips touching the water, muddy and impure, but clear and sweet to her.

She drank long and greedily, quenching the awful thirst that raged within, and at last fell back with a cry of thankfulness on the river's bank!

The moment when Dandy Jack found himself in the midst of the fire, as it were, was the most exciting one of his life.

He scarce could stir, for the arm of his rescuer was about him, and the roughest of faces was pressed against his.

A strong north wind rushed down the fire-fringed avenue; it gave the boy the air which he breathed with joy; but it did not seem to revive his companion.

The horse never faltered. As if conscious of the duty assigned him, he dashed on until, to

Dandy Jack's unspeakable delight, the red gantlet was ended.

Out from the fiery hell dashed the Indian horse, still carrying his riders; over the blackened ground where smoked the ruins of wigwams, into the night dark as Erebus, and heavy with the stench of burning hides.

The strange rescuer did not show any signs of life, even after the fire had been passed, and Jack at last felt the cheek getting cold.

The arm around him relaxed when he made a movement to disentangle himself, and, as with great effort he freed himself from the touch of the cheek, he spoke to his deliverer.

"We're out of the fire now and still in the land of the living?" he said. "Hadrn't we better stop and take our bearings? I owe you a life for you came in the nick of time."

There was no reply, and the boy felt perplexed.

He could see the outlines of the figure which he addressed; he could touch it, but the expression and the reason for the silence were hidden from him.

"It's mighty queer!" Jack murmured to himself. "The fellow can't be asleep. It's no time for muddin'!"

The horse was going on, but slowly during these moments, and Jack had made himself quite comfortable on his back.

"I'm going to see about this!" he said firmly at last. "Not another step will I go till I find why you keep your mouth shut, old fellow!"

He seized the rein and stopped the horse, and finally disengaged himself from his rescuer.

As he did so the unknown swayed to the left, and then to Dandy Jack's utter astonishment, fell to the ground!

"It beats the Jews!" the amazed youth exclaimed as he sprang from the horse, but kept his hand on the bridle-rein. "The fellow acts like a dead man."

The boy rider now bent over the object lying motionless before him. His eyes accustomed to the darkness were becoming useful, and he saw that the unknown was an Indian.

Dandy Jack's hand assisted him in the inspection; it moved over the body to come in contact with a feathered barb, and forced the boy back with a startling cry.

"An arrow in the side, just like the dog had," our hero said. "He's dead! he died when the fire was around us, I expect. Now I'll try to find out who he is. Mebbe—"

A sudden recognition broke the sentence; the brass buckle plate of the Indian's belt with its legend "U.S." told the story.

"It is Sun-Dance!" cried the boy. "Twice has he saved my life! The skunks shot him in the side; but dead though he was he carried me through the fire. Sun-Dance, you're the whitest hearted Indian that ever lived, and I'll pay them back for that sneaking arrow-shot."

The boy rose and shook his fist at the light that told him where the Indian town was being blotted from existence.

"Sun-Dance was worth your whole sneaking nation!" he shouted. "When you shot him you robbed me of the best Indian friend a white boy ever had. I've got another friend, Red Jack Rabbit; but I've seen him for the last time, no doubt. I bless the man who fired your red nest to-night, and I think the day is coming when Dandy Jack will be a thorn in your side. I'm getting used to this wild life. Now let me find Estil and old Lige, and I'll feel like astonishing the natives."

Dandy Jack ceased, and the horse looking around saw him looking tenderly into the scarred face of Sun-Dance.

It was all over with the young Tlamath; the greatest foe the Snake nation ever had was no longer their dread.

His partnership with Long Lige had proved of short duration; but during it his bullet had made the red clan chieftainless, and the last act of his life had been one of unselfish heroism.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HO! FOR THE COAST!

"LISTEN, Dandy Jack! Thar goes the sound of that horse ag'in! Ef Lige Butler believed in ghosts—"

"You'd swear it was one, eh?"

"That's jest what I'd do. The critter's stopped now. Praps it is the Injun's horse what come up in the night an' stampeded the corral!"

"It might be!" admitted Dandy Jack, musingly.

Long Lige did not reply, but with his head bent to the west was listening for a repetition of the sounds which had enchaind his attention.

The two had met on the boundless plains, and were together once more, hunting for the girl Estil, whose fate was as yet unknown to them.

They had followed, during several days, the trail of the stampeded horses, but without making any discoveries which promised to prove of any benefit. They had even traced the herd back to the ruined corral, from whence it had dashed southward to be followed no more by the trailers.

Luke Whittles and Oregon Leon also kept out of the hunter's sight; they, too, perhaps, if living, were hunting for the young girl.

A night of inky darkness hung over the west plains when the conversation just given passed between Butler and his *protege*. The sound of hoofs, silent for the moment, had been a cause of much perplexity to the trailers; they had heard them quite near for several nights, in succession, but were unable to discover their import.

"Thar they go ag'in!" Long Lige ejaculated, after a brief silence. "Now, don't stir, Jack, fur they're comin' to'ards us at last. Pistol out, boy, an' knife ready, for heaven knows what kind o' thing it is."

It was true as the long guide said that the unseen horse was coming toward them.

The couple sat motionless on the blankets.

At last the hoofs stopped directly before Dandy Jack, and the nostrils of his steed met those of the unseen. The feelings of the boy cannot be described; he seemed to be in the presence of the supernatural.

By straining his eyes, he caught the outlines of the horse before him; but he saw more than this. The strange beast had a rider.

"Injun, by hokey!" suddenly ejaculated the guide, and the next moment the unknown horse started back with a snort of terror.

At the same time aloud cry rung out upon the night.

"It is Estil!" cried Dandy Jack, and before Butler could reply he darted after the horse, whose course could be distinguished by the pattern of his hoofs.

"Injun, more like!" muttered the old guide. "The boy is bound to keep his fingers in the fire. Now I'll have to hunt him ag'in. I guess I'll die huntin' the young 'uns, in this pesky kentry!"

Meanwhile, the boy was flying through the night after the horse, and at last he rode alongside and seized the rein.

With the jerk the strange horse stopped.

"Mercy on me!" he heard a voice exclaim.

"Indian or white? tell me which!"

"White it is! and you are Estil!"

"Jack!"

There was a cry of joy, and Dandy Jack knew that Estil was the rider of the "ghostly" horse.

The meeting full of surprise and joy cannot be fitly described.

The youthful pair had not finished their congratulations when Long Lige came up, guided by their voices and joined in the happiness of the moment.

"The herd left me almost friendless at the river!" Estil said during the narrative of her adventures since her separation from the twain. "But this noble horse stuck to me."

"It is Little River. I feel the *lazo* mark on his neck!" cried Jack.

"Keep still, boy, an' let our Estil go on."

He has been my companion since that night. I guided him for a while, but he would have his own way in spite of me, and at last I concluded to leave him to his own inclinations, trusting that everything would happen for the best. I have fortunately encountered no one with whom I could exchange words. But yesterday I came in sight of two men standing face to face on the plains; but before I met their gaze, I turned the horse and reached the cottonwood along the river."

"War they white men?" asked Butler with eager curiosity.

"I can not say; they were not near enough to permit me to distinguish them."

"I've an idee," the old guide answered meaningfully; but as he was not pressed for any explanation he did not enlarge upon his remark.

"Which way is it now?" asked Dandy Jack.

"To the sea-shore. I hired myself to take the gal to her mother-an' Lige Butler keeps all his contracts. We've got no wagon now; but with three good animals we oughter git along. I left the can of meat down by the Snake town; the reds hev gobbled it I guess. If they see what you writ on it, boy, they'll not be apt to tech it. I fetched it all the way from the wagon, for I thought I might have use for it. The niter glisere in that can is the best article of preserved beef to be found west o' the Rockies."

"Preserved meat?" echoed Estil.

"Thet's jest what war in the case. It skeered Luke Whittles an' the Injuns, Dandy Jack says. Thet'll be a good joke on the coast."

A light laugh rippled over Estil's lips.

Shortly afterward the trio left the spot of the reunion, and pushed southward.

"Hyar's your two men, Estil, gal!" suddenly cried Long Lige reining in his steed quite early one morning before two bodies lying stiff and ghastly among the buffalo grass. "I'll bet my gun that they ar' the larkies what you see'd the other day standin' face to face. They've had their fight out, each killed the other, jest like the Kilkenny cats."

The Oregon guide sprung from his horse, and knelt over the two bodies.

"Jest as I 'spected!" he suddenly cried looking up into the anxious faces regarding him. "Somehow or other these two devils came together an' settled their diffikilities with lead an' steel. It war an uncommon tussle, for jest look at the grass hyarabouts. Master an' man hev squar'd their books, an' left no balance. I'd like to hev stood off an' seen the scrimmage. First I'd 'a' cheered one an' then t'other. We'll let 'em lie. The Injuns will never git to pay him back for burnin' their town!"

Leaving Oregon Leon and Luke Whittles side by side on the plain, just as they had fallen in mortal combat, the guide remounted his steed.

With a last look at the men who had terrorized their fellow-creatures in life, the trio rode from the spot.

The story of that fatal encounter between the villains will never be told for no human eye witnessed it.

Perhaps at night the two had accidentally come together, or if they were the men whom Estil had seen standing face to face on the plains, they fought their last fight in the blessed light of day.

But be our conjectures as they may, the discovery of the bodies told our adventurers that a terrible justice had overtaken the men of crime.

The remainder of the journey to the Pacific coast was finished without noteworthy incident, and Estil found herself in her mother's arms once more.

"I reckon you'll stay hyar, boy. Thar be a pair o' blue eyes in these parts what fairly dance when they look at you."

"Oh, that's all imagination, Lige."

"Imagination, eh? You've got all the sym'toms, an' you're in more danger hyar than you was in old War-Bow's village. The gal doesn't shoot her arrers in the side; they hit higher up."

Dandy Jack blushed and hung his head.

"Yes, you'll stay hyar I guess, boy," put in the guide.

"Yes, sir; he is going to stay!" said a sweet voice, and Estil appeared among the flowery vines on the porch. "If he must see Red Jack Rabbit again, why, Mr. Butler will go back and bring the boy hither."

"Sartinly I'll go!" said Long Lige. "Just you coax Dandy Jack to stick to the coast, gal. You've caught a tip-top feller, an' the other gals will all envy you when they know it. Make him promise to stay."

At that moment Dandy Jack looked up.

Estil was going to speak; but his smile kept back her words.

"Here ends the trail," he said. "I'm going to stick to the coast!"

"And to the purtiest gal hyar!" said Lige.

THE END.

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